

Check out the anatomy  
of an online original **p35**

Cartoon Network and Lego  
unveil multiplatform Mixels **p20**

**MIP Jr**—Inside the US preschool scene  
shake-up, sourcing comedy talent **p72**



# kidscreen®

engaging the global children's entertainment industry

SEPTEMBER 2013



**26x26'**  
**LIVE ACTION & ANIMATION**

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## On a wildride!

**Disney Junior** takes US preschool ratings crown,  
ramps up new series to stay in the driver's seat



# Calimero

104x11'

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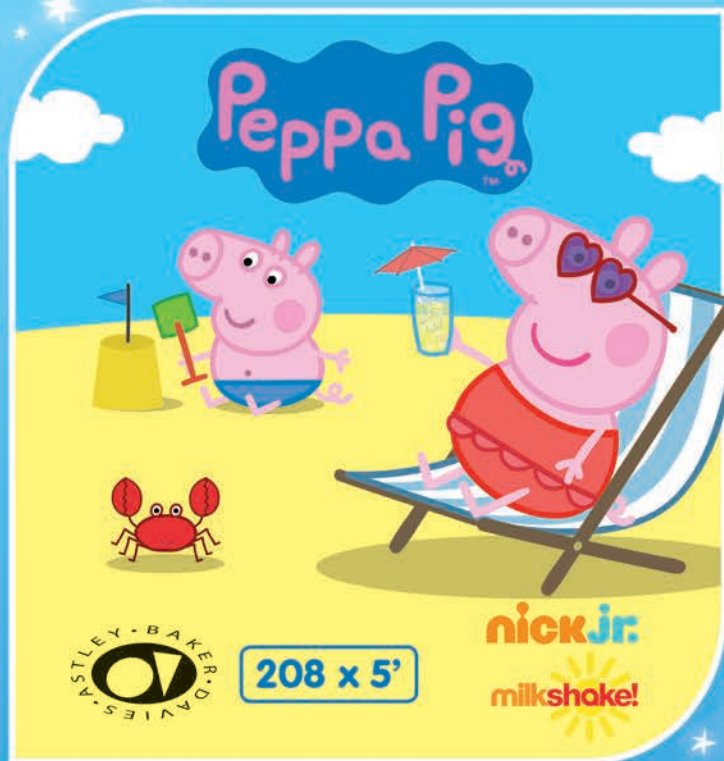
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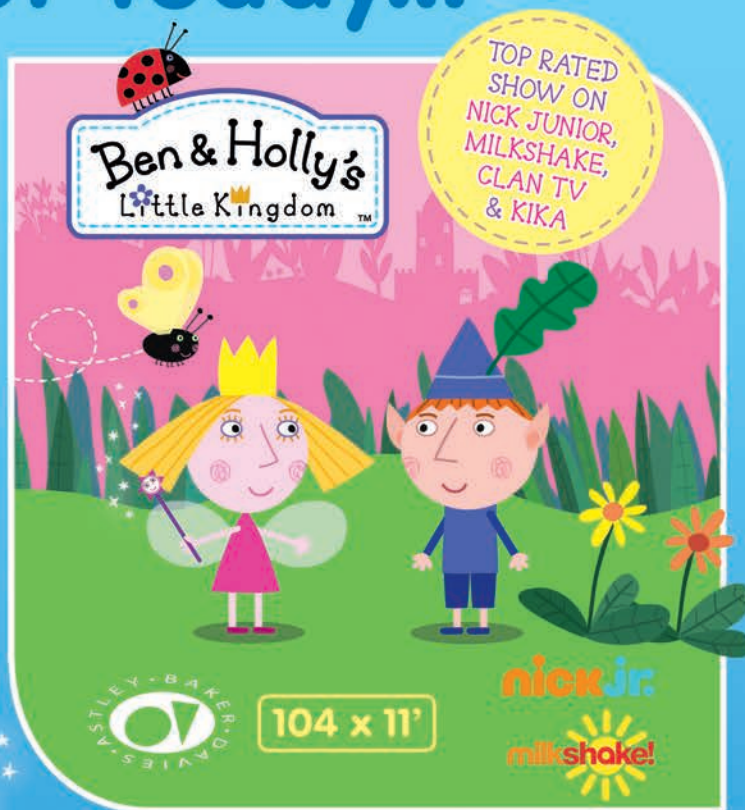
Peppa Pig

nick jr.  
milkshake!

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208 x 5'

Peppa Pig is shown on a beach with her family. Peppa is sitting on a lounge chair, and George is building a sandcastle. A small crab is also visible.



Ben & Holly's  
Little Kingdom™

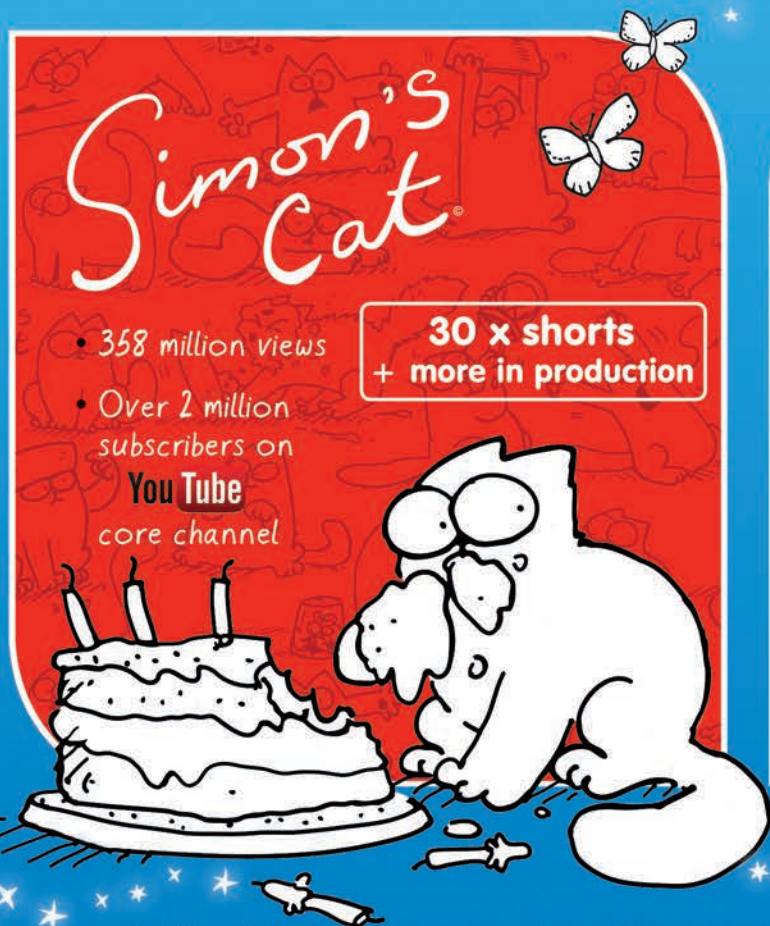
TOP RATED  
SHOW ON  
NICK JUNIOR,  
MILKSHAKE,  
CLAN TV  
& KIKA

nick jr.  
milkshake!

ASTLEY • BAKER • DAVIES

104 x 11'

Ben and Holly are shown in a magical forest setting. Ben is a boy with a crown, and Holly is a girl with a crown. A ladybug is also visible.



Simon's  
Cat

- 358 million views
- Over 2 million subscribers on YouTube core channel

30 x shorts  
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Simon's Cat is shown sitting next to a large cake with candles. The background is red with various cat-related icons.



The Magic  
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Special

The Magic Hockey Skates is shown with a boy in a red jacket and a girl in a blue jacket. The background is a snowy landscape with trees.

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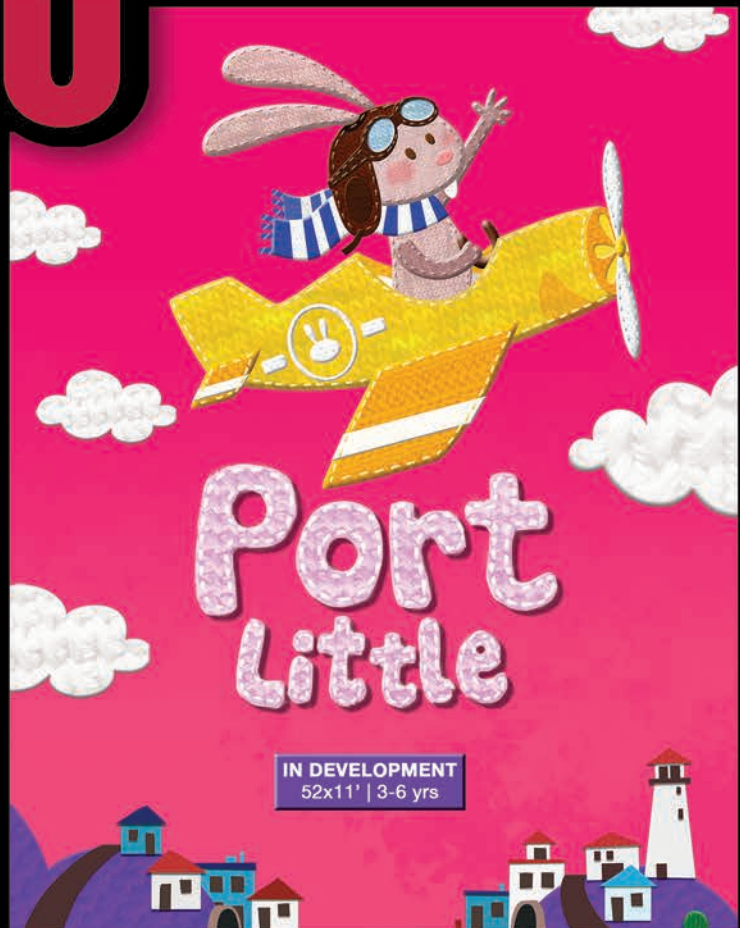
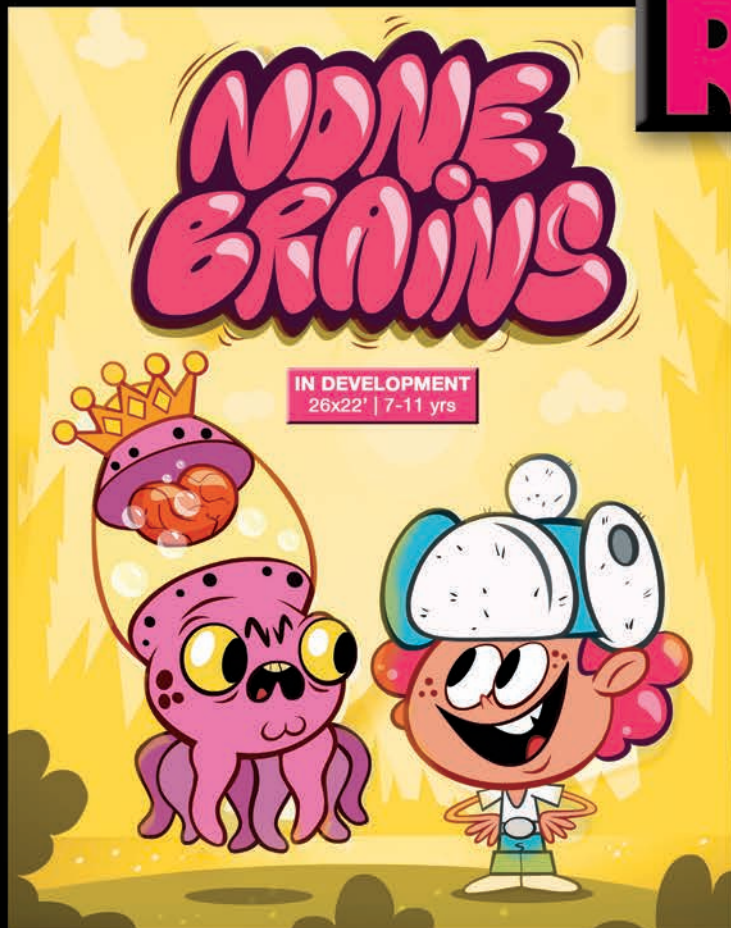
**65** Spin Master  
pilots growth  
with Meccano buy

**Cover** Our cover features an ad for Zagtoon's new mixed-media series *Ghostblog.com*, while our inside editorial cover sports an image from Disney Junior's upcoming series *The 7D*, featuring the Seven Dwarfs like you've never seen them before.





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# It bears repeating

Way back in our January 2012 issue, I wrote about the brewing three-way dust-up between Google, Apple and the big cable companies—not to mention ever-growing Netflix and Amazon—for the hearts, minds and wallets of TV viewers in the US.



It then looked like those three giants would soon be competing seriously for ownership of the family living room and consumers' entertainment dollars. At that time, I said, the looming face-off would put producers in a more enviable situation than their current one—one where content would

finally be king for real, and these services would be tripping over themselves to pay for programming that would differentiate them from the competition.

Nineteen months later (maybe the equivalent of five years in the digital space), it looks like the battlefield is getting more crowded, with consumer electronics giants Intel, Samsung and Sony throwing their hats into the internet TV/SVOD ring. And how are these yet-to-be launched services all making headlines right now? A lot of insider musings and reports are leaking, alluding to just how much these newcomers are willing to pay for content that will give them a leg up on their competition. A billion for NFL football rights? "Phht. Pocket change," says Google, reportedly. And we know that Amazon didn't blink when it recently handed Viacom upwards of US\$200 million for content to fuel its Instant Prime SVOD service.

Granted the price of rights to even the most scorching-hot of children's series will never be comparable to what the NFL can command, but my point is that the stock of good high-quality content seems to be rising, and potential buyers are getting pickier. What it means, especially for the kids space in the US, is that there are more opportunities for creators and producers now than there have been in a long time, but the barrier to entry may be getting higher.

As each new service looks to distinguish itself from the pack, it's never been more important to search high and low for those rare/amazing ideas and sink some money into their development. In fact, on the traditional TV side, you can see how well that strategy has paid off for Disney Junior. Just a year after its launch, the 24/7 channel claimed the top spot in US preschool, thanks largely to a fresh new approach to curriculum and original series like *Doc McStuffins* (see "Preschool power play," p.72). So how does that saying go, again? What's good for the Mouse is good for...?

Cheers,

**Lana**

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A vibrant, stylized illustration for a poster. The background is a mix of red, orange, and blue with dynamic, angular shapes. In the upper left, a black football boot with red studs is shown from a side profile. In the upper right, a large, detailed soccer ball with blue and white panels is depicted. The title 'EXTREME FOOTBALL' is prominently displayed in the center. 'EXTREME' is in a blue, outlined, sans-serif font, while 'FOOTBALL' is in a large, bold, yellow 3D font with a red outline and a soccer ball pattern on the 'O's. 


# EXTREME FOOTBALL

MIPCOM stand LR4.02 / [zodiakkids.com](http://zodiakkids.com)

**zodiak**  
KIDS

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# asian animation summit

Promoting co-production and co-financing  
December 9-11, 2013 • Phuket, Thailand

## Dive in & discover Asia's best new kids content



photo: jeffgunn

## Registration is now open!

[www.asiananimationsummit.com](http://www.asiananimationsummit.com)

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## What is it?

Neither a market nor a conference, the Asian Animation Summit program will feature presentations of new kids TV concepts from Australia, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand that are in early stages of financing and development.

Sign up and take a first look at projects that have been carefully selected based on their global-market potential and quality—any one of them could be the industry's next big hit.

## Where & when?

AAS 2013 is set to take place from December 9 to 11 in Phuket, Thailand. The event has been optimally timed to run right after Asia Television Forum (December 3-6), with a weekend in between for travel from Singapore.

Our venue is the Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort & Spa on Karon Beach, a tropical paradise famous for its beautiful 5km stretch of white sand, big turquoise waves and spectacular sunsets. Set in lush, tropical gardens surrounded by mountains and waterfalls, this five-star hotel has five swimming pools, an award-winning spa and plenty of restaurants & bars to choose from—basically, you won't ever want to go home!



## Who will be there?

The first-ever Asian Animation Summit attracted nearly 300 attendees to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in December 2012, and we're anticipating at least 350 delegates will take part this year. The event is designed to appeal to producers of animation who are interested in co-producing projects with Asian partners, as well as broadcasters, distributors and investors from Asia and elsewhere.

## What's new this year?

We've expanded our program by a full day this year, and will be running project presentations consecutively. So no need to pick & choose between screenings—you'll get to see each and every concept that makes it into our showcase. We'll also be kicking off each day of the event with a highly informative "Regional Funding Seminar" that explores the intricacies and benefits of setting up co-productions in Australia, Malaysia and Korea. Take part in all three of these critical learning sessions and get a top-to-bottom understanding of where the funding is in Asia for Kids programming, and how you can tap into it with the right partners.

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# Bradley and Bee

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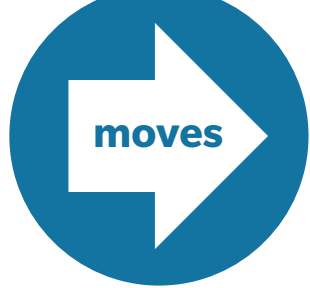


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# The List

Five things on our radar this month

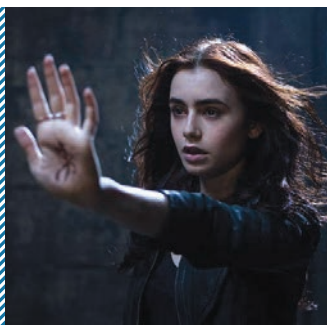
## 1 Battling for digital

The stage is set. We're talking about the land-grab being made by the biggest media companies in the world for content rights to fuel their new internet TV offerings. Reportedly, Sony, Google, Intel, Amazon and Samsung are all in talks with major content owners (and it's the networks, not the cable carriers) to give them the inside track to conquering the internet-TV universe. Sony has reportedly reached a deal with Viacom, giving the electronics giant access to a treasure trove of ones and zeros to fill its slate. Apple, meanwhile, is rumored to be chatting up ESPN and HBO, as well as Viacom. Even Google is on the field, having reportedly taken a stab at obtaining the exclusive rights to *NFL Sunday Ticket*, after its US\$1-billion-a-year contract with DirecTV runs out in 2014. It's all conjecture at this point, so it's hard to say who will be the ultimate victors—as always, it's a good idea to hedge your bets until someone raises the white flag.



## 2 Licensed toys heat up summer

Finally there is some good news from the number-crunchers at NPD. The market researcher reported that US sales of licensed toys were up 4% this past summer, led by a 20% jump in the licensed action figure category. Top licenses right now include Doc McStuffins, Iron Man, Monsters Inc., Superman and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. We'll see whether or not fall will keep the heat turned up.



## 3 Dystopian box office?

The *Mortal Instruments* was hoping to turn its YA book success into the next mega film franchise à la *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*, but after *City of Bones* opened to a paltry US\$9.3 million in the US, the film's producer is now banking on global sales to compensate. The disappointing returns from other recent YA adaptations like *Beautiful Creatures* certainly doesn't bode well for the next post-apocalyptic YA outing, *Divergent*.




## 4 Bring your A-game

With Samsung smartphones now commanding 30% of the mobile market and Google Play surpassing the Apple App Store in downloads for the first time by a staggering 10%, the Android vs. Apple war has never offered more entertainment value. Apple is still generating more than double Android's revenue, though, making for a numbers game that's undoubtedly going to get a lot more interesting.



## 5 Batty casting

Ben Affleck may have been the bomb in *Phantoms*, but he certainly didn't get any love for his bland portrayal of Marvel superhero Daredevil in 2003. Now the celebrated director will don Batman's famous cape and cowl in Warner Bros.' untitled sequel to *Man of Steel*. The internet has already delivered a thumbs-down on the choice. But is it possible he'll bring something fresh to the role? Stay tuned, same bat time, same bat channel.

 To keep up with the news as it happens, check out [Kidscreen.com](http://Kidscreen.com) daily.





Growing up in London, **Patricia Hidalgo** spent so much time doodling that her high school classmates voted her “most likely to work for Disney.” And she did exactly that—for 15 years. Having recently moved to Turner, the former competitive horse rider continues to take her life and career in stride.

## Pursuing a global path to programming success

**The gig** Turner International’s SVP and chief kids content officer for EMEA, overseeing all programming, including acquisitions, co-productions and originals, for the company’s kids channels—Cartoon Network, Boomerang and preschool offering Cartoonito.

**Signs of things to come** As an animal-loving teenager who settled in England when her family relocated from Madrid, Hidalgo thought she might end up becoming a zoologist. However, her love of drawing animals and bringing out their characters in stories and comics actually planted the seed for her artistic career. After receiving a B.A. in graphic design from Middlesex University, Hidalgo worked in London for a year before moving back to Spain to take a job as a graphic designer at Canal+. “It was the first time in Spain you had pay TV and cable. They allowed us to experiment with the way we created our graphic title sequences and continuity promos. Everything was new and exciting,” says Hidalgo. She adds that she never expected to leave until the MD of Disney Channel Spain at the time, Simon Amselem, offered her a graphic design job after the pair met randomly at a wedding.

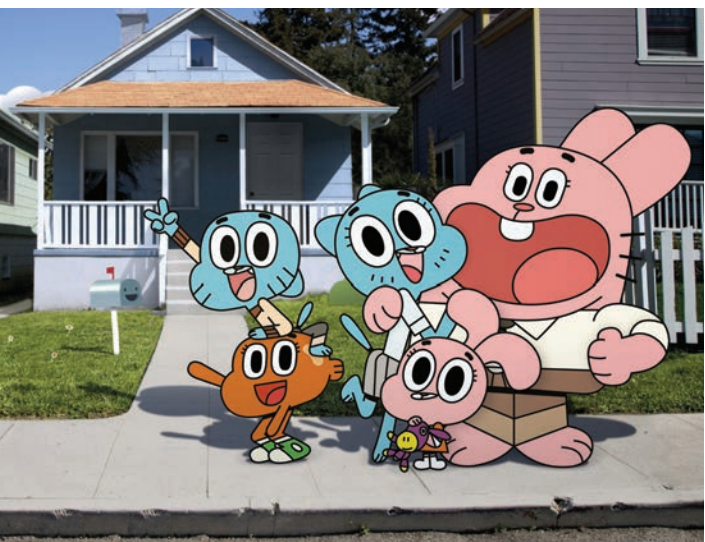
**Move to programming** Two months before Disney Channel Spain launched, Hidalgo was asked to take on more responsibility as a manager reporting to programming. After working her way up the ladder for a few years, she accepted a role as Disney’s programming director in Italy. “Moving to Italy was my biggest career challenge,” she says. “I didn’t speak the language and I had never done programming before, although I had a passion for it.” Two months into her new job, and determined to win over the locals, Hidalgo was asked to make a presentation at a press conference. She insisted she would deliver it in Italian, which she did. Hidalgo eventually became VP of content and programming strategy for Disney EMEA, helping to launch its first telenovela for kids, and rebranding its Playhouse Disney and Jetix channels.

**Settling in** Hidalgo says her career-making moment came when she applied for the EMEA role at Disney. “That changed everything, because not only did I get to work at the local level, but I also had the chance to work on high-profile projects,” she says. “For example, I devised

and implemented a workflow of animatronics that would allow us to share promos, graphics and interstitials for the first time globally and across EMEA.” Hidalgo also attributes much of her success to the strong support she’s received from her father, family, co-workers and furry friends. “My dogs inspire me a lot because they are always so grateful for even the littlest things I give them.” And one of the most important things she’s learned about kids programming is to always remember who your audience is. “Adults sometimes have preconceived ideas, but kids don’t. We might think things don’t work in certain countries, but kids are kids. They are much more open than we think they are.”

**On the horizon** Now at Turner, Hidalgo is looking forward to developing the company’s content strategy and working with its global teams. “The

slate is strong with *Adventure Time* and *The Amazing World of Gumball*, but I’m very excited about what we are creating here in the EMEA, too.” —Jeremy Dickson



Hidalgo’s looking forward to creating more Turner EMEA originals like *Gumball*

## Out of Office

Tales from the frequent fliers club



**Steven Wendland**

VP and Creative Head, Technicolor Digital Productions

### 1. In my carry-on

You’ll find an iPad, laptop, headphones, some chocolate, two packs of Xylitol gum, an inflatable neck pillow, extra socks, a t-shirt, and spare room for one or two bottles of duty-free wine from whatever country I am departing—I like to travel light.



### 2. My go-to gadget

My Bowers & Wilkins P5 headphones.

### 3. On the fly

I’ve learned, if I ever were to lose my wallet at a bus stop in Geneva, the good people there would find a way to get it back to me.

### 4. Preferred in-air tunes

Music from the Barbie movies and The Muppets soundtrack. (For my daughter, really!)

### 5. Best in-flight food

British Airways makes the best smoked Shetland salmon tartare.

### 6. Best power-lunch

In Annecy, usually at L’Imperial, but so many of the restaurants there are great.

### 7. Window or aisle?

Aisle—I like to be one of the first ones off the plane.





# Yu-Gi-Oh!

# ZEXAL

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# Sweet success

Cupcake Digital expands its licensed app lineup for kids and parents

**Who** In just over a year since launching, New York-based app developer Cupcake Digital has already left a sizable mark on the kids entertainment business by partnering with the likes of Nick Jr., Discovery, The Jim Henson Company, American Greetings and Zodiac Kids on mobile storybook apps and games based on some of the industry's best known properties. Co-founded by technology and marketing guru Brad Powers and seasoned entertainment producer Susan Miller, Cupcake has grown from a small team in New York to a multi-faceted company with a technology team based in Moncton, New Brunswick and ties to leading educational experts. With a growing number of partnerships, including recent ones with DreamWorks' Big Idea Entertainment and Nelvana Enterprises, and consistently top-ranked apps for kids four to seven across iOS and Android app stores, the company remains focused on providing quality, multi-lingual content for kids that entertains, educates and promotes offline learning.

**Why take note** Cupcake got off to a fast start when *Wubbzy's Pirate Treasure*, based on the hit Nick Jr. series, *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!*, became a top-ranked storybook app on iTunes and Amazon. It's since released 17 additional apps based on the IP, including upcoming bilingual title *Wubbzy's Train Adventure* and puzzle and play app *Wubbzy's Puzzles*. "When we license one app, we secure a license for a series of apps within each IP," says Powers. "Whether it's Strawberry Shortcake or Babar, we set out to publish a series of apps in a long-term publishing plan." While many developers choose to launch some licensed titles along with their own original apps, perhaps looking for the next runaway success like *Angry Birds* or *Temple Run*, Cupcake has remained committed to partnering with other entertainment companies to develop brand-based apps. "One of the decisions we made early on was to utilize very well-known kids IP that fit either one or two criteria—that they are on television or have a high degree of nostalgic value," says Powers. "We thought this would be a good way to cut through the clutter of the various app stores and make our content something that kids and parents would recognize."

**Becoming efficient** A big reason why Cupcake has been able to develop as many apps as it has in such a short period of time is because of its specially designed proprietary app engine. "We built the engine in a very modular fashion so things like our coloring book and language engines could be used across all of our various apps and licensed IP," says Powers. "We can take what would normally be a five-, 11- or 24-minute TV program and adjust that to fit the context of an educational storybook in a very rapid amount of time." With all of its engines firing, Cupcake is able to release three different app types—storybook, creative play and educational (reinforcing Core Curriculum State Standards). While most of its apps follow the paid model without in-app purchases, it's now beginning to introduce free puzzle and play apps. "We're experimenting with this right now to see if it's a viable means of exposing both kids and parents to our apps," says Powers. —Jeremy Dickson



American Greetings Properties' *Strawberry Shortcake* is just one of several licenses snapped up by the growing app developer in the year since it launched

## Know your audience

By Jim Benton



©jimbenton.com



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# Six seconds is Peanuts for Vine animator

**Khoa Phan's stop-motion videos are quickly defining a new artform—and new content extensions for kid-friendly brands**

**W**hat kind of story can you really tell in six short seconds? That was the question asked by many when Twitter-owned Vine, a micro-video blogging platform, launched in January. The app-based video-sharing platform allows users to film and post six-second video clips using just one button on their smartphones. The videos can then be posted on a variety of social media, including Twitter. However, the first wave of Vines to hit the cybersphere left something to be desired.

"I made a Vine of me making morning coffee, just like everyone else did," explains Khoa Phan, who can now, just a few months later, accurately describe himself as the world's first professional Viner. "I figured that could get really boring, really quick, so I thought I should do some stop-motion animation Vines."

The idea was an instant success, and Phan's whimsical and curious construction paper-based stop-motion Vines, which have between 90 and 100 separate edits in them, began to go viral. The San Diego, California resident says he just followed his own creative sensibilities with stop-motion montages like *Ode to Keith Haring* and *The Magic Water Faucet*. His fanciful attitude served his creations well, and after generating some internet notoriety, he received a direct message from the official @Snoopy Twitter account.



"I was like, 'Is this real?'" he recalls. "Is this really Peanuts!?"

Peanuts Worldwide reached out to Phan to discuss using his innovative approach to the nascent medium to promote its brand, which of course has its roots in the traditional medium of newspaper comics.

Peanuts commissioned Khoa to produce 12 different Vines and 10 Instagrams to be released on a monthly basis. The company reports that the first Vines have been viewed thousands of times and distributed to more than two million people throughout its social media networks. Reportedly, the Vine promotion is a part of a social media campaign for Peanuts' still-untitled 3D-animated movie due to hit theaters in 2015.

The first Peanuts Vine featured six different personas of Snoopy, and in the many hours he spent creating it, Phan says his admiration for the iconic comic strip grew.

"It was like living my childhood again," he says. "I gained an appreciation for how those storylines and characters are really formed and an understanding for how complex a body of work it is."

## On the circuit

Notes for the industry travel diary

**October 7-10**

**MIPCOM**

**Cannes, France**

[www.mipcom.com](http://www.mipcom.com)



The global market for entertainment content makes its return this October, when the industry's leaders meet in Cannes for four days. From blockbusters to indie productions, and everything in between, this year's MIPCOM will draw an estimated 13,000 participants, 4,400 buyers and 1,700 exhibitors across 100 countries, and they'll consume untold kilos of stinky-but-delicious fromage.

**October 15-17**

**Brand Licensing Europe**

**London, England**

[www.brandlicensing.eu/brand-licensing-europe](http://www.brandlicensing.eu/brand-licensing-europe)



The European licensing industry will once again host one of its most definitive events, now in its 15th year. BLE will play home to retailers, licensees and sales promotion professionals, who get to meet with more than 280 brand owners to get a look at 2,200 new properties, characters and images on the market. To help wade through the madness, this year will feature dedicated areas for Art, Design & Image, Brands and Character & Entertainment.

**December 9-11**

**Asian Animation Summit**  
**Phuket, Thailand**

[asiananimationsummit.com](http://asiananimationsummit.com)

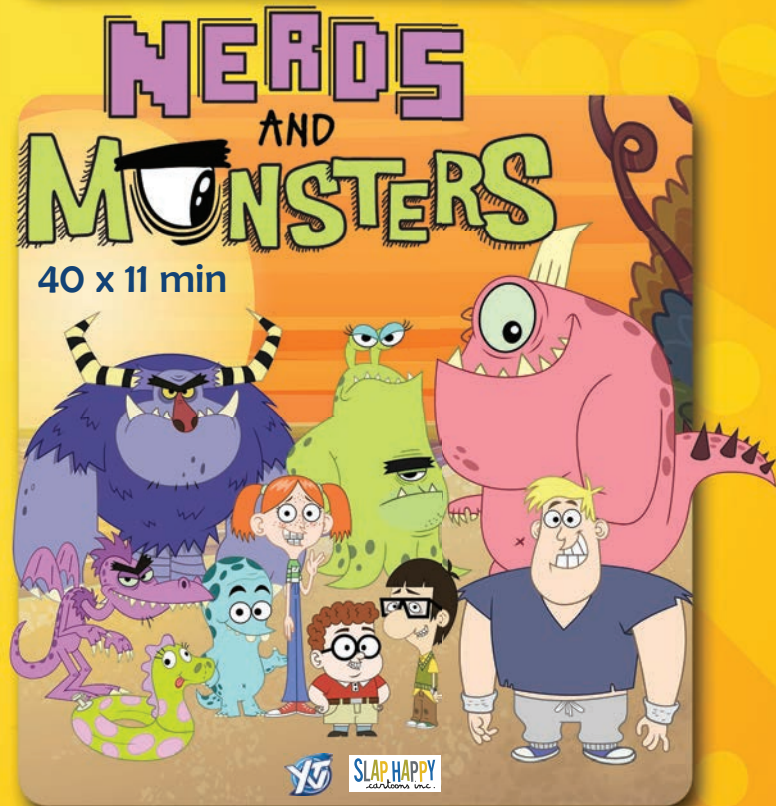
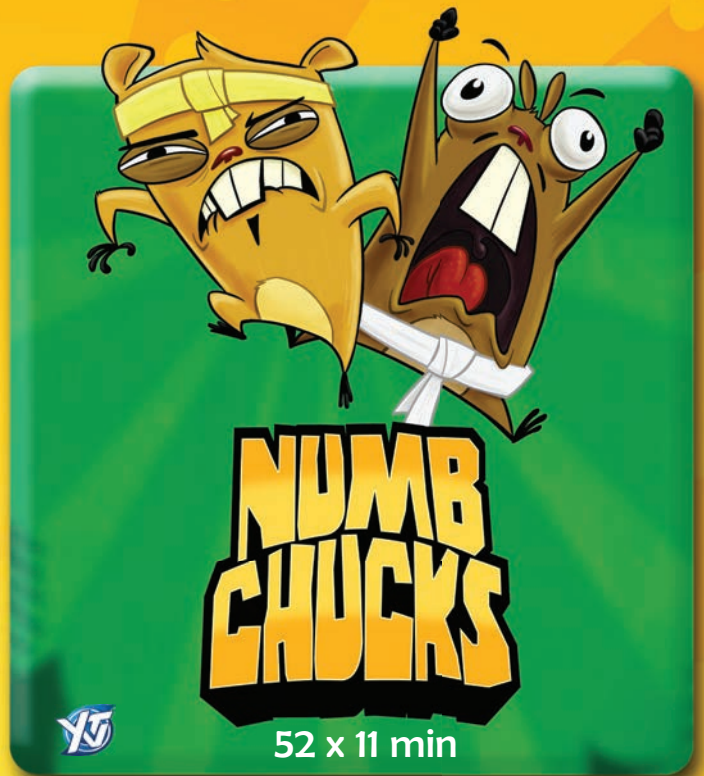
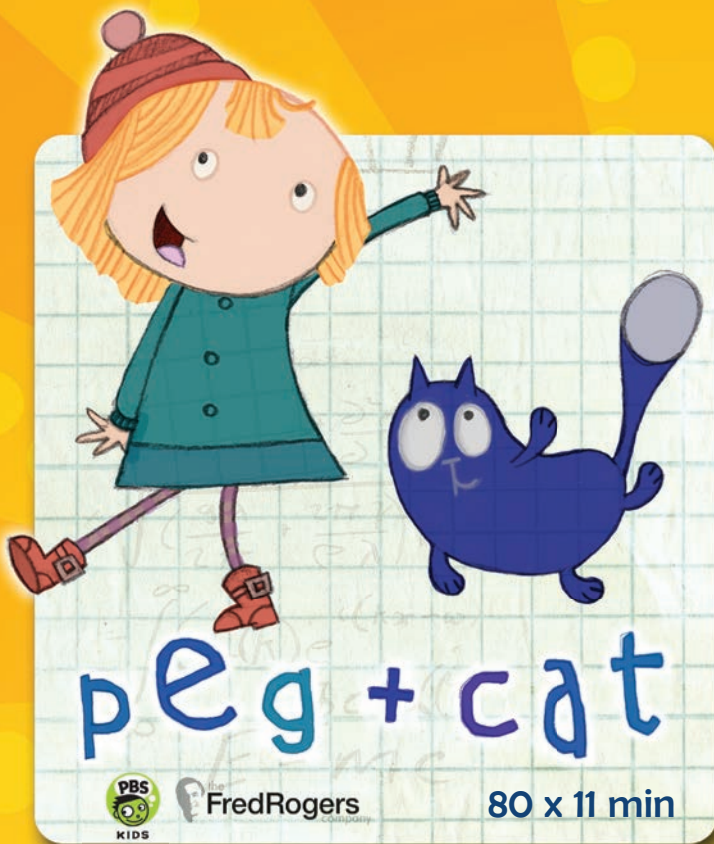


This annual event is designed to showcase Asia's strongest animated projects looking for investors and partners, and to stimulate co-production and co-financing of animation in the region and beyond. During three days on the island of Phuket, Thailand, participants will attend presentations of new children's TV series concepts (and some film concepts) from Australia, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand. There will also be plenty of time built into the schedule for meetings, casual networking and taking in the region's breathtaking views and spicy Thai cuisine.



A full listing of Industry Events is available at [kidscreen.com/events](http://kidscreen.com/events)





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Phan's six-second Vine videos have upped the ante for the medium—using up to 100 edits, each stop-motion animation is made from thousands of hand-crafted paper figures

While he has no plans to move into longer-form animation, Phan says he is always open to new artistic ventures. "I can't imagine how much work goes into a full animated series," he laughs. "But you never know, maybe someday."

One thing is certain, however, is that the viral success of the Peanuts Vines proves the medium can be an integral part of modern marketing campaigns.

"It's only six seconds," says Phan. "But you can do a lot."

Of course, Peanuts Worldwide is no stranger to searching out new platforms to increase brand visibility. Back in 1985, Peanuts inked a deal with insurance company

MetLife to have its characters appear in promotional materials, sales literature, premium items and advertising. The lucrative and far-sighted deal has kept creator Charles Schulz's characters highly visible while their contemporaries have fallen far from the public eye. Accordingly, the deal was renewed in 2002. —Gary Rusak



Like what you've read here? Be sure to sign up for our new **iKids Weekly** newsletter ([kidscreen.com/ikids-subscribe](http://kidscreen.com/ikids-subscribe)) for more of-the-moment insights into the business of children's digital media, delivered right to your inbox.



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In a move to strengthen its preschool brand management, Mattel's HIT Entertainment has hired three veteran execs, **Robin Gay**, **Will Speer** and **Gina Briggs**, to head up its global brand and marketing efforts for a number of its properties including Thomas & Friends, Bob the Builder, Fireman Sam and Mike the Knight. While Gay and Speer will be UK-based, and Briggs is working from New York, all three will report directly to HIT's VP of global brands, Shari Donnenfeld. Gay, who most recently ran the franchise business for Disney brands like Mickey Mouse & Friends and Phineas and Ferb, is now the global brand director

the Nickelodeon Viacom Consumer Products team in 2011 as director of EMEA retail sales and marketing and pan-European licensing.

Also in the UK, **Gwen Hughes [A]** has been promoted from head of production to MD at Zodiak Media's The Foundation, as former MD **Vanessa Hill** departs the production company behind *Finger Tips*, *Stephen & Holly's Showdown* and *Waybuloo*. During her 30-year career, Hughes has worked across news, sport, drama and children's television in a variety of production roles, with credits including children's series *Motor-*

director at Penguin Children's. His relationship with *Made In Me* began during his six years at Penguin UK, which forged a partnership with the development company to create new digital formats and projects.

Over in American TV land, **Nancy Kanter** has been upped to EVP of original programming and GM at Disney Junior Worldwide, which is currently reigning as television's number-one preschool network in the US. Previously SVP and GM of Disney Junior, Kanter currently leads the creative content for the brand globally, and under her leadership, the programming block delivered its biggest

involved in creating and producing such hit series as *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *iCarly*. Her move to DreamWorks is timed with the studio's expanded TV efforts, and over the next five years, her production slate will encompass new TV series based on DreamWorks' current franchises, future films and the most popular heritage properties from Classic Media, totaling 1,200 new original episodes. Joining Cohn's revamped team as head of television production is fellow Nick vet **Mark Taylor**, who was most recently at the helm of Nickelodeon Animation Studio. **Peter Gal**, the DreamWorks Ani-

Long-time FremantleMedia exec **David Luner** has been promoted to the newly created position of EVP of brand partnerships and franchise management for FremantleMedia North America, where he will now be tasked with overseeing all of FMNA's ancillary businesses including digital, integrated marketing and brand partnerships, licensing and live events. He was most recently EVP for digital and licensing of the former FremantleMedia Enterprises Group.

Moving to Asia, Paris-based kids programming distribution and brand-management company

## people



for Thomas & Friends. Also hailing from Disney, Speer is now global brand director for Bob the Builder and Fireman Sam. Briggs, formerly of Nickelodeon, rounds out the hires as senior global brand manager for Mike the Knight. The expansion comes on the heels of Mattel posting weaker-than-expected second quarter profits. But Thomas and Mike the Knight have experienced continued growth.

In other licensing news, Nickelodeon & Viacom Consumer Products has promoted **Marianne James** to VP of consumer products for UK and Ireland, and European retail sales and marketing. James is responsible for planning, developing and implementing consumer products retail strategies. She joined

*mouth* and *Tickety Toc*. She joined The Foundation in 1996 as a production assistant—two years after the company was formed by Hill and Ged Allen at The Maidstone Studios in Kent, England.

Meanwhile, children's publishing expert **Eric Huang [B]** has joined kid-focused digital agency Made In Me in the newly created position of development director. Huang will look to strengthen the UK company's licensing, publishing and broadcasting efforts in support of expanding IP growth and brand development. He was most recently development director at Moshi Monsters' shop Mind Candy, a role he held since April. Prior to that, he was the new business and IP acquisitions

year in 2012 on Disney Channel and the year's top three cable TV series for preschoolers. Kanter will continue to oversee development and production for all Disney Junior series, including *Sofia the First*, as well as short-form series *A Poem Is...* and *Minnie's Bow-Toons*. The channel launched in March 2012, 11 years after Kanter first joined the company.

With its second quarter profits up a hefty 74% and revenues rising by 31%, DreamWorks Animation is continuing to beef up its TV strategy with the appointment of Nickelodeon vet **Marjorie Cohn [D]** as its first head of television. During her 26 years at Nickelodeon—most recently as president of content development—Cohn was

mation exec who oversees creative on DreamWorks *Dragons: Riders of Berk* and *Turbo F.A.S.T.*, will now serve as the head of television development.

In Canada, **Ian Lambur [C]** has joined Guru Studio as director of sales as the studio expands its efforts across 2D animation, apps, publishing, home video and licensing. Lambur will manage worldwide sales and expand the company's family-focused distribution catalogue. On top of selling *Justin Time* and third-party properties, he will also help secure finance and presales for projects in development. Lambur is a Kidscreen and Vodka Capital alum.

PGS Entertainment has founded a new Hong Kong-based company, PGS H.K. Ltd., which will rep the company's largely animation-based catalogue in the region. PGS co-owner and co-founder **Guillaume Soutter** is heading up the operation and will now serve as president of PGS H.K. It will seek out opportunities to work with Asian content producers and provide direct manufacturing support to PGS Entertainment's growing licensing and merchandising businesses in the region. First on tap for PGS H.K. will be representing Asian rights for the entire PGS library.

For more People Moves, head over to [kidscreen.com/category/people-moves](http://kidscreen.com/category/people-moves)



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*Annedroids*, from *Sinking Ship*, was headed into pre-production when Amazon sent out its first call for pilots



# Anatomy of an online original

**Kidscreen takes a peek into Amazon's online originals process from the producers' perspectives**

BY JEREMY DICKSON

As the race for differentiation intensifies in the SVOD space, online heavyweight Amazon is taking a novel crowd-sourcing approach to help determine its original slate for entertainment-hungry kids. The studio's new pilot initiative has helped set Amazon's Prime Instant Video service apart from its biggest US competitors in the kids space—Netflix and Hulu Plus. Using a unique selection process, where Amazon users view pilot submissions online and post their feedback, the studio determines which entries get greenlit for full series production.

Since the pilot program's April launch, three pilots aimed at younger kids have been put into full-series production, and five brand-new pilots for the six to 11 demo have been earmarked for the user-feedback process. The first three series—*Annedroids* (*Sinking Ship*), *Creative Galaxy* (*Out of the Blue*) and *Tumbleleaf* (Bix Pix Entertainment)—are set to stream exclusively on Amazon's Prime Instant Video and UK-based LOVEFiLM later this year.

For Toronto, Canada-based *Sinking Ship* co-founder and *Annedroids* creator JJ Johnson, the chance to work with Amazon was an opportunity he couldn't turn down, considering its latest accomplishments with digital media. In this year's second quarter, digital products dominated Amazon's bestsellers list, including Kindle and Kindle Fire devices and digital versions of movies and TV shows. Additionally, Amazon's nine-month-old Kindle FreeTime Unlimited service for kids ages three to eight now boasts a library of more than 1,000 eBooks, games, TV shows, movies and educational apps.

"With other shows, you have the challenge of finding retail partners, but the fact that Amazon is the biggest online retailer suggests that if your show does well, entering into merchandising could be that much easier," says Johnson.

"Partnering with a company that owns the Kindle device also means we can already think about how to integrate apps into the show and envision what the experience will be like for viewers watching it on a Kindle. If Amazon can capitalize on these things, it will be a challenge [for its competitors] to beat it."



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For Angela Santomero, of New York-based Out of the Blue Enterprises, linear broadcast remains an integral part of her business, but having a new model enter the kids content market has been a welcome addition. "In the US, there are very few large broadcasters we can take our content to, and we've worked with almost all of them," she notes.

"Obviously we've worked very well with PBS, and Nick is the first home of *Blue's Clues*, so we hope to continue to do more with them. But the idea that new original programming strategies are opening up is exciting for people like us who constantly have creative ideas."

Johnson and Santomero also applaud Amazon for so far taking a strong collaborative approach, given that their respective pilots' paths to production have been markedly different.

### Bringing *Annedroids* to life

Creating a science-based, live-action/CGI show was an idea Johnson had been kicking around for a long time, but he was stymied by how to present simple science experiments in an age-appropriate way. "We wanted to do a show that would focus on the kind of science I think kids want to see, which involves explosions and things melting. But I couldn't figure out a way to do it so kids wouldn't try to replicate the experiments at home and possibly hurt themselves," he explains.

Johnson solved the problem by introducing robot characters that could assist the show's leads. Aimed at kids ages five to eight, *Annedroids* follows the adventures of kid-scientist Anne, her three android creations, and her assistant Nick as they perform experiments in her junkyard laboratory. "So, if the robots get damaged, you can show that the experiments are dangerous. But because robots don't feel pain and can be repaired, it enables us to explore all the wonderful story potential that surrounds awesome science experiments."

Sinking Ship was admittedly in a different position from the two other first-round pilots that made the cut. In fact, *Annedroids* already had financing lined up and was in pre-production when Amazon announced the pilot program. "The series is not exclusive to Amazon. When it picked us up, we were a week away from shooting the first episode," says Johnson.

Skipping over developing the concept with a network first, Sinking Ship went straight to shooting a four-minute pilot for the US\$250,000-per-episode series three years ago. At the time, Johnson says a number of networks liked the concept, but were hesitant because it was a science-based show with a female lead and a high danger quotient.

"That's the burden of live action—it does feel [more real than animation], but we were lucky because we had a lot of interest from [public broadcasters] around the world and didn't have to rely on core commercial networks."

Before Amazon selected the pilot, Sinking Ship brought on TVO (Canada), SRC (French-speaking Canada) and KiKA (Germany) as partners for the 26 x half-hour series (seasons one and two included). "It's our first full half-hour series; we're currently on episode seven

and we're lucky that TVO has already picked up season three and four," says Johnson. He adds that the series needs one more sale to its existing partners to be fully financed for the third and fourth seasons. But with all of its early success, submitting *Annedroids* to Amazon did not come without its challenges.

### Adaptation hurdles

"Because Amazon needed a full 11-minute demo and we were headed into pre-production and hadn't picked our new cast, we had to provide an animated version and a live-action teaser," explains Johnson.

**"The idea that new original programming strategies are opening up is exciting for people like us who constantly have creative ideas."**

— Angela Santomero, Out of the Blue Enterprises



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Fortunately, online viewers watched both versions and many commented that they preferred the live-action segment. "It was awesome to see the Amazon feedback on a much larger scale with more at stake [than showing demos to internal circles]," says Johnson. "The feedback was mostly helpful, but some was very cruel—someone even called us 'robot apologists for the oncoming robot revolution.'"

He adds that some commenters criticized Anne's character for being a little bit too dark and morose, which led to a change in how she was portrayed. "Those were good notes for us. We had to make sure that we lightened her within the first episode. She's meant to be a little standoffish, but not so much that the audience doesn't connect with her."

Amazon's support for the show's multi-ep story arcs that are best viewed in chronological order has also been a bonus. "Kids haven't seen shows done this way in a long time. Series are often so rigid, in that episode one has to be able to play beside episode 52. But Amazon gets the need to make event television," Johnson contends.

Of course, getting an audience to tune into the event is a bit of a different story, he admits. "The challenge is, we need people to actively search out the series because we don't have a lead-in TV show to rely on. But I love that we need to stand on our own."



With production well under way, meeting Amazon's early 2014 delivery date has become a key goal for Johnson's team. "We're rushing to hit delivery because the animation takes anywhere from four to six months to incorporate into live action and we're just trying to lock our first cut now," he says.


For Santomero's mixed-media, interactive art series *Creative Galaxy*, time is also of the essence. She says the speed of production on the 26 x 11-minute animated series has been its biggest hurdle. "We want the quality to be there, but the challenge is managing quality plus the time," she says. "It's aggressive in terms of our production schedules."

## Getting creative

Although Santomero and co-creator Traci Paige Johnson had been bouncing around the idea for the series since their early days working on *Blue's Clues*, it was still in development by the time Amazon came into the mix. At press time, however, the series was in the middle of scripting, and Toronto, Canada-based 9 Story Entertainment was working on design, the first storyboards and animation tests.

Like Sinking Ship's Johnson, Santomero was also drawn to Amazon's reputation in digital media. "Amazon's level of interactivity and its potential is what attracted us to their pilot proposition," she says.

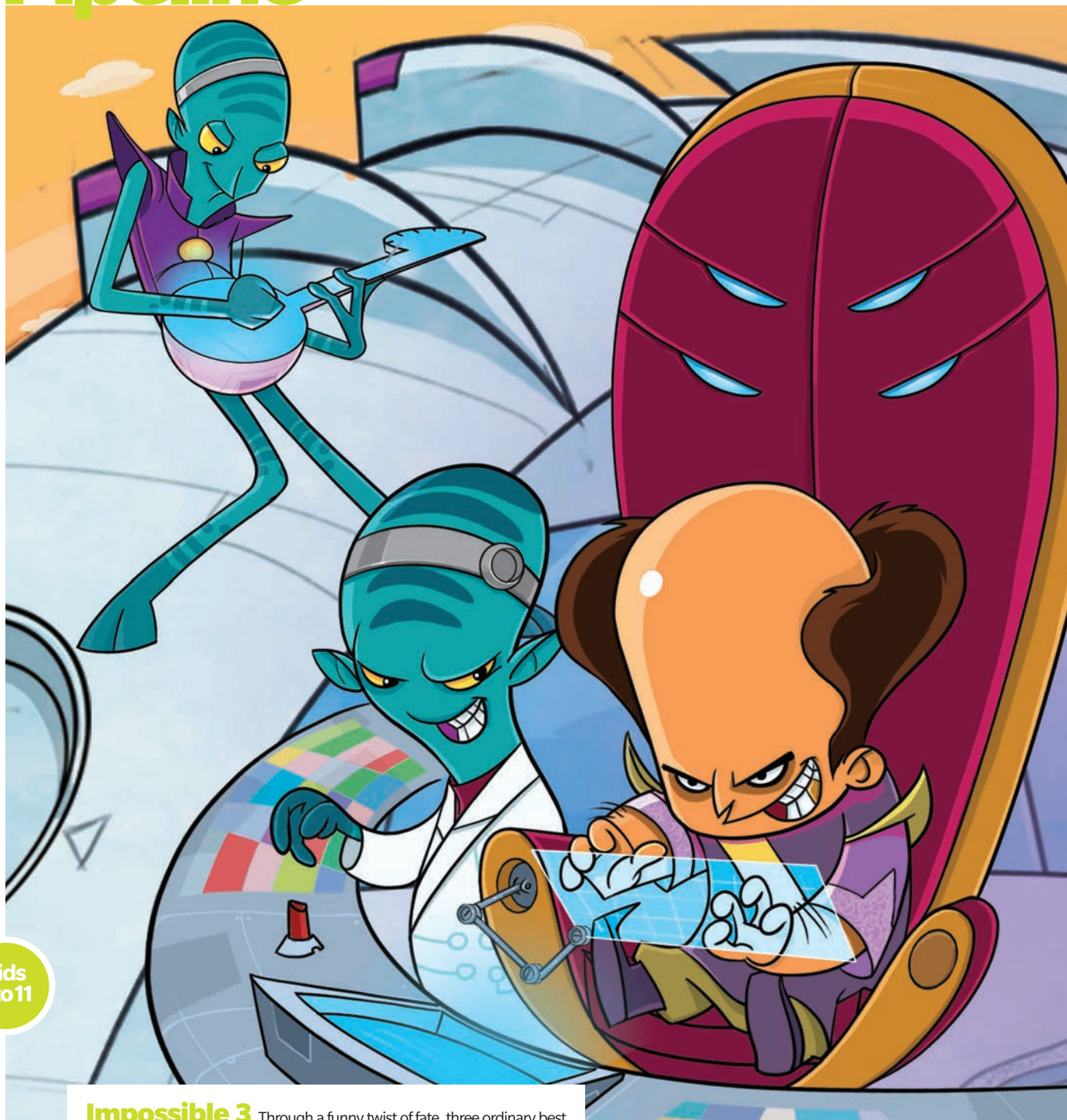
The series, which stars a lovable alien artist, inspires kids' creative thinking through crafts, story, music and dance, and features a live-action DIY crafting segment at the end of every episode.

Amazon, according to Santomero (whose new *Wishenpoof!* project is one of Amazon's five newly selected pilots), has been in contact with her team at least on a weekly basis. "We're not just on our own. Amazon has a point of view and has been very supportive." 



# Pipeline

An early peek at shows on the development track



kids  
6to11

**Impossible 3** Through a funny twist of fate, three ordinary best friends (a singing camel, a streetwise mynah bird, and a martial arts-obsessed hedgehog—naturally) come into contact with an advanced alien technology and instantly acquire superhero alter egos. Now with special abilities, the unlikely trio puts their regular pizza-eating, TV-watching days behind them, and use their new powers to save mankind from a power-hungry diabolical villain. Taking inspiration from classic cartoons like *Power Puff Girls* in its visual zaniness and pacing, the comedy-adventure series from Adam Khwaja and the CN Studios Arabia team is stuffed with visual gags, and blended with touches of contemporary action and witty dialogue.

**Co-producers:** Cartoon Network Studios Arabia (UAE), Home Plate Entertainment (US)

**Style:** 2D animation

**Format:** 52 x 11 minutes (26 x half hours)

**Budget:** Approximately US\$360,000/half hour

**Delivery:** Q2 2015

**Status:** In development/pre-production, with a trailer in the works and two scripts and a bible completed. The team will be looking for select co-pro partners and pre-buys in Cannes.



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kids  
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## A Skeleton Story

This comedy series, based on Alessandro Rak's Italian comic books, follows the adventures of skeleton detective Will Musil and his eccentric zombie assistant, Burma. The story unfolds when a little girl named Bimba and her cat accidentally stumble through a portal into the Skeleton World and meet its number-one detective. With cat in tow, the trio goes on to investigate the strange parallel world where forests can restore memories and trains travel on water. Each ep features a fast-paced, self-contained three-act story.

**Co-Producers:** MAD (Italy), Red Kite Animation (Scotland), EllipsAnime (France)

**Style:** CGI with 2D rendering

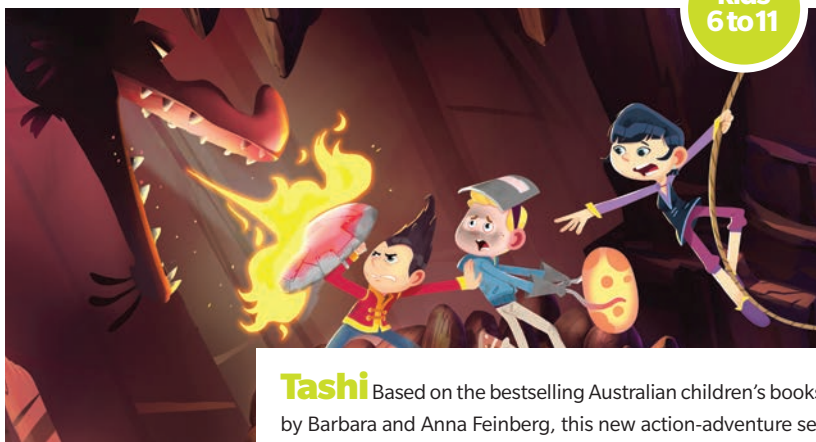
**Format:** 52 x 11 minutes

**Budget:** Approximately US\$7.8 million

**Delivery:** June 2015

**Status:** In development, with a bible and two scripts completed and a trailer in production. Pubcaster RAI has signed on in Italy.

kids  
6 to 11



**Tashi** Based on the bestselling Australian children's books by Barbara and Anna Feinberg, this new action-adventure series follows the magical journey of a young boy named Jack, who leaves his city life behind after his parents send him to live with his distant cousin, Tashi. Unbeknownst to Jack, his cousin lives in a mystical, exotic land where the pair must embark on a series of quests to protect Tashi's village from giants, ghosts, witches, bandits, demons and dragons. More than 70 creatures are featured in the colorful world—including flying houses with chicken feet (and why not?). Flying Bark has Barbara Stephen (*The Adventures of Figaro Pho*) on-board to produce, with Fin Edquist (script editor) and Marc Wasik (director of *Vic the Viking*) joining the team.

**Co-Producers:** Flying Bark Productions (Australia) in association with Telegael (Ireland) and Discreet Art Productions (India)

**Style:** 2D CG animation

**Format:** 52 x 11 minutes

**Budget:** Roughly US\$350,000/half hour

**Delivery:** Late 2014

**Status:** Early pre-production with a trailer ready for MIP and pre-buys from ABC and Seven Network in Australia. Studio 100 Media is handling distribution.





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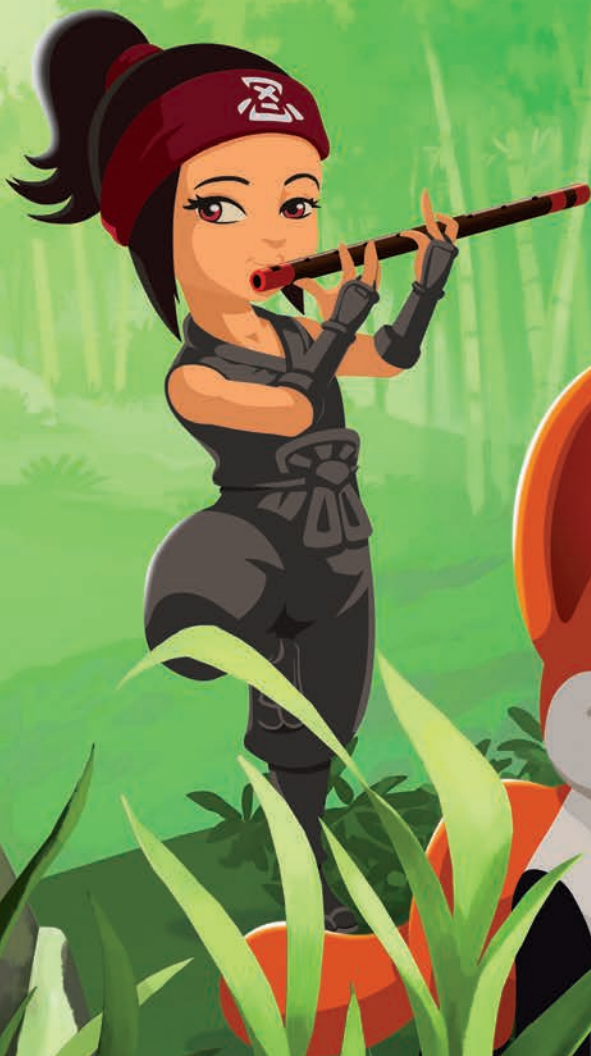
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\* based on the video game Mini Ninjas created by IO and distributed by Square Enix \*





## Tuning In



# Vortexx grows boys audience

One year since launching in the US, Saban's multi-platform Vortexx brand is beefing up its programming lineup and expanding its reach

**The channel** In a broadcast landscape dominated by large 24/7 kidsnets, Saban Brand's Vortexx Saturday morning block for kids two to 11 on The CW is something of an anomaly. The 7 a.m. to noon boy-skewing block, which was previously owned by 4Kids Entertainment and dubbed The CW4Kids Toonzai block, features action, adventure and comedy series supported by online content at [www.myvortexx.com](http://www.myvortexx.com) and mobile entertainment. Reaching 115 million homes, plus another 40 million cable subscribers through a new VOD partnership with on-demand kids network Kabillion, the platform just unveiled its fall TV schedule. It's currently on the lookout for new third-party comedy and action-adventure content that appeals to both boys and girls.

**The programming** Anchored by popular current titles such as *Power Rangers*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, *Sonic X*, *Dragonball Z Kai*, WWE's *Saturday Morning Slam* and *Justice League Unlimited*, the block recently added *Bolts and Blip*, anime-based *B-DAMAN CROSSFIRE*, former WB show *Spectacular Spider-Man*, and educational preschool series *The Adventures of Chuck & Friends*, from Hasbro Studios and Nelvana, to the slate. "Our commitment to the CW is we provide at least one hour of educational content to help fulfill the affiliates' commitment (they have to offer three hours per week by FCC law)," says Vortexx president Joel Andryc.

Additional new pickups include CG-animated *Sendokai Champions* (fall 2013) and the brand-new *Digimon Fusion* (winter 2013) series based on the iconic long-running Japanese franchise. Andryc says two of the platform's top performers, *Dragonball Z Kai* and *Power Rangers*, have the luxury of being continual evergreens shows. "*Dragonball Z Kai* has been around for more than 10 years. It's been re-invented, yet maintains its core anime fan base, and the card play and collectability elements that go along with the IP," he says. He adds that the phenomenal success of the DC Comics and Marvel superhero film franchises have helped make *Justice League Unlimited* a ratings contender.



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One of Saban Brands recent acquisitions, Digimon, is back with a new series

**Unique advantages** Although Vortexx is aimed at the two to 11 set, its anime offerings are expanding its demographic. "We do get a pretty sizable older audience because anime skews about nine to 14 and 12 to 17," says Andryc, noting that one of the block's biggest selling points is its 100% penetration rate across US households. "If advertisers are buying NickToons or Disney XD, they are missing approximately 40 to 50 million households," he says. "We're also attracting a strong multicultural audience, over-indexing with Hispanics and African Americans."

**Promotion push** Because Vortexx is not 24/7, it's had to focus on providing high-quality on-line and mobile experiences and 360-degree marketing campaigns. "The biggest challenge is getting the message out to kids that there is an alternative to the 24/7 kids cablenets," explains Andryc. "We need to be available to kids anytime, anyplace, and on any device. So in addition to our broadcast platform, we knew we had to be on the web, offering games, activities, multiple episodes and site-exclusive content." While a Vortexx mobile app offering is currently in the works, the block's website does link to Saban-branded mobile apps featuring Power Rangers and Paul Frank, and to games on Saban's safe online kids environment, Zui.com.

For promotions, Andryc says Vortexx is leveraging social media, off-channel and on-air spots, and grassroots initiatives. "We're going to boys and girls clubs, and soccer fields, and we had a field team at this year's San Diego Comic-Con. We take the brand out when and where we can." —Jeremy Dickson



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## Now Trending—Media

What's bubbling up in kid content culture



### Got original web content?

As more kids turn to mobile devices and the web for their entertainment needs, content creators continue to ramp up their investments in original programming for digital platforms. Retail giant Amazon, in particular, is leading the online charge with three original kids series currently in production, five new kids pilots headed to Amazon Instant Video early next year, and an additional pilot for live-action series *Maker Shack Agency* (pictured), from Electus Entertainment, getting the greenlight last month. Disney is also amping up its push into the digital world with its newly launched short-form, live-action web series *The Coppertop Flop Show*, while for older teens and young adults, The CW has unveiled CW Seed. The network's brand-new experimental digital entertainment studio and website already features four original web series with an emphasis on comedy.



### Kids IPs focus on health

Although an August report from the Centers for Disease and Control Prevention revealed the first evidence of a national decline in childhood obesity, one-third of children and teens are still obese or overweight in the US. To address the ongoing issue, kids content producers are increasing their efforts to promote health and wellness. Disney Junior kicked off a Doc McStuffins-branded interactive US tour on August 18 in Boston, featuring physical development, nutrition and fitness activities for kids. Meanwhile, PBS Kids recently partnered with grocer Whole Foods for a new online and in-store initiative that supports nutrition for kids and families, and leverages PBS Kids' new math-based preschool series *Peg + Cat*.





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# Super RTL tops in Germany

The Cologne-based family channel ranks number one in market share for the three to 13 demo, but the entry of Disney Channel in January will shake things up

When Disney launches its new channel in January, marking the first time German kids and families will have free access to its popular library, it will become a direct competitor with 50/50 joint-venture partner, Super RTL. It's still not known whether or not the Mouse House will sell its stake in Super RTL. But seeing that Super RTL cut 15% of its workforce in June and then secured a new five-year deal with DreamWorks for more than 1,100 half hours of programming, it certainly appears as though the kidsnet is making a back-up plan.

Despite the pending fallout of Disney Germany's launch, Super RTL held a market share of 21.3% for three to 13s in June, relying mostly on Disney for hit programs. Its top two shows were *Good Luck Charlie* (435,300 viewers, 31.8% market share) followed by *Phineas and Ferb*. The channel, which airs from 6 a.m. to 12:30 a.m., has a strong preschool morning block and gets its best ratings through the day; it switches focus to more family-based content at night.

Beginning this month, DreamWorks is set to deliver series based on movies *How To Train Your Dragon* and *Turbo*, the first of its shows to air on Super RTL. The channel will also have access to content from DreamWorks' newly acquired Classic Media library.

On the local programming front, Super RTL has faced challenges. "Although it does commission some local programming, often as a co-production partner, it has no local series in its top rankings," says Eurodata TV research manager Johanna Karsenty. "The local German animation mar-



Disney's *Good Luck Charlie* draws top ratings for Germany's number one kidsnet, Super RTL

ket is not particularly strong, partially because it hasn't had as much help from the government," she contends. "Few titles appear among the top-ranking programs, although pubcaster KiKA takes on a lot of European productions, which often do well."

The top two and three kidsnets in market share for June were KiKA (15.3%) and Nickelodeon (8.9%). Combined with Super RTL, these three channels have led the children's TV market in Germany for quite some time. In fact, they are now out-performing the main generalist channels."

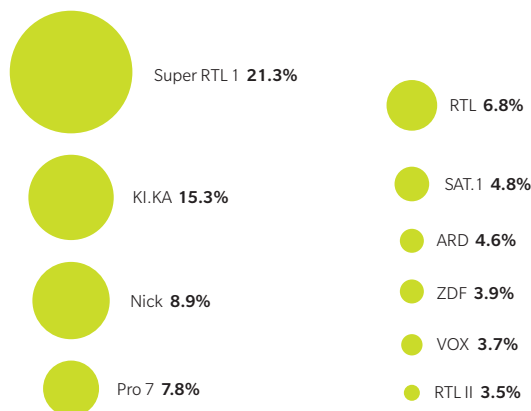
While Super RTL reaches a higher total day market share, KiKA has more titles in the top ranks, mostly due to its strong programming in late afternoon and evening from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., as well as its most famous program, *Unser Sandmännchen*. For June, stereoscopic series *The New Adventures of Peter Pan* was KiKA's highest-rated show for kids ages three to 13 (571,500 viewers, 38.2% market share), with the *Jungle Book* placing second and local hit *Unser Sandmännchen* in third spot, followed by *Franklin*, *The Little Prince*, and a number of Super RTL/Disney titles like *Good Luck Charlie*.

As the third-highest-rating channel, Nickelodeon's top program was long-running series *SpongeBob SquarePants* with 192,100 kid viewers and a 29.1% market share.

The best-performing kids block on a generalist channel from July to December 2012 belonged to pubcaster ZDF. It drew an 11.1% market share for kids three to 13 with its 5:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Saturday kids block, and a 16.8% share on its 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. Sunday block. ZDF broadcasts the same programs as KiKA, which is a ZDF and ARD joint-venture.

—Jeremy Dickson

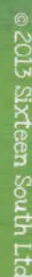
## Market share Children 3 to 13



Eurodata TV Worldwide is a French company specializing in TV audience ratings research and market intelligence that offers TV data as well as expertise and insight into the performance of TV shows in more than 90 countries. Ratings information is provided directly by research institutes in each country, which, like Eurodata's parent company Médiamétrie, measure daily television audience ratings. For more information, contact sales manager Jacques Balducci (jbalducci@eurodatatv.com, 33-1-4758-9434).



A collage featuring a large, textured green leaf, a white mask with a camera lens, and a blue mask with a camera lens, set against a blue sky background. The text "re ay." is visible on the left side.



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The HiP logo features a circular emblem on the left, composed of a central orange star-like shape surrounded by a ring of smaller orange triangles. To the right of the emblem, the letters "HiP" are written in a bold, orange, sans-serif font.



# Sam & Cat

Nickelodeon primes hit spin-off comedy series for the world



When award-winning executive producer Dan Schneider pitched Nickelodeon the idea of putting two of the kidsnet's most beloved characters—Sam (*iCarly*) and Cat (*Victorious*)—into a new sitcom, the network couldn't say no. With Schneider's hits *iCarly* and *Victorious* taking their final bows this year, the timing was right to create something fresh yet familiar. *Sam & Cat* debuted on Nick US on June 8, and as of mid July, it stood as network's number-one live-action series, averaging 3.7 million viewers. Now, Nick's prepping the series for a worldwide cable and terrestrial rollout.

**Big reaction** *Sam & Cat* follows the comedic exploits of the two unlikely teenage best friends who become roommates and launch an after-school babysitting service. It swept all kids demos as the top-ranked show on its June 8 debut, averaging 4.2 million in total viewers to achieve Nick's biggest live-action launch in three years, according to Nielsen. Nick US quickly commissioned an additional 20 episodes to join its original order of 20 x half hours. The new eps will continue to roll out this year, debuting on Nick's global channels starting in October. Nickelodeon assumed fans of *iCarly* and *Victorious* would be instantly drawn to the new show, but the fact that not everyone would be aware of the characters was part of the net's launch strategy. To best promote the show, Nick's CMO and president of consumer products Pam Kaufman says her team focused on off-channel approaches utilizing social media, event appearances and advertising.

**Show promotion** "Taking an off-channel approach is something we haven't done too many times, but it's going to be a priority now and for the future," says Kaufman. "Ariana Grande (Cat) and Jeanette McCurdy (Sam) have huge followings on their personal Twitter and Facebook accounts, and for the first time, we used social media in a big marketing effort with the audience and the girls." She adds that Grande and McCurdy also created buzz for the show via Instagram and a special uStream event, and by making a raft of appearances on talk shows and girl-targeted online video networks like Awesomeness TV. Additional efforts were made across Nick's non-linear platforms including a custom *Sam & Cat* website, featuring animated versions of the characters, and putting tailored content on the *Nick App*.

And as part of the show's three-week TV campaign, Nick had the girls guest host its popular interstitial series *Nick Studio 10* for a week. While on the sponsored promo front, Grande and McCurdy are featured in retailer Old Navy's back-to-school campaign, in a comedic campaign with Nesquik, and Nick is currently in negotiations with Lego on a brand-new campaign.

**What's next** According to Kaufman, Nick's normal rule is to wait a full calendar year before considering a consumer products rollout for any IP. "We're not quite there yet from a licensing perspective, but we've had a tremendous response from the advertising community. We will need to determine if there are more opportunities with some of our third-party sponsors," she says.

In the meantime, the kidsnet is particularly pumped for an upcoming fall episode featuring the first appearance by *Laverne & Shirley*'s Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams in a series together in more than 30 years.

—Jeremy Dickson

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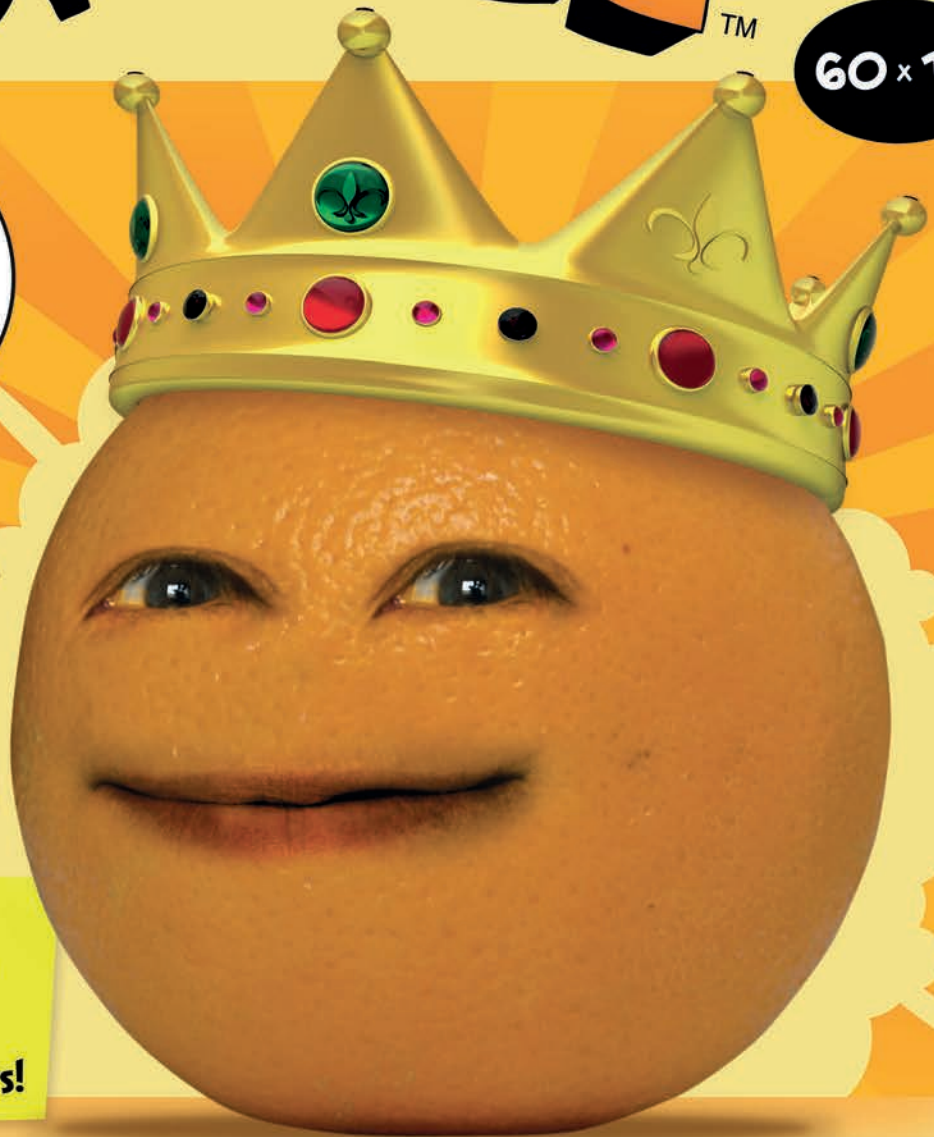
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Based on the addition of a mini ball-joint, Mixels characters—and their upcoming shorts and app-powered game from CN—put a cool new twist on Lego tradition

**Cartoon Network and  
Lego join forces to create a  
new original multiplatform IP**

# Mixing it up

BY GARY RUSAK

In the usually sleepy summer month of July, news of a wholly original joint-creation from two of the industry's biggest names was sure to grab headlines. Enter Mixels. The new multiplatform, multi-SKU brand came to light through a process of "organic development" between broadcast heavyweight Cartoon Network and the most valuable toyco in the world, Lego.

"We looked at shifts in our audience with the style and format of content consumption," says Rob Sorcher, chief content officer for Cartoon Network, explaining what led to the innovative partnership that had its genesis a little more than a year ago. "We flew to [Lego's Denmark-based head office in] Billund and we were lucky enough to be able to exchange some ideas with them."

Growing out of a previous partnership around Lego's hit toy/TV IPs *Legends of Chima* and *Ninjago*, the companies had become familiar with each other. The success of the two properties enticed the principals to consider a broader, more all-encompassing approach to their next venture. "On our visit, we got to see some product development," says Sorcher. "And just seized upon one particular thing that we saw."



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Lego has had a stellar track record with content based on its brands in the past few years, and plans to continue the streak in 2014 with Mixels and *The Lego Movie*



## Building a plan

Always privy to Lego's products in development, the company's VP of licensing and entertainment, Jill Wilfert, says the earliest incarnation of what was to become Mixels had certain aspects that called to mind the Cartoon Network ethos. "It deals with very small creatures, and I thought that its sensibilities would match up with Cartoon Network's," she says. "When they came over to discuss Chima, we shared it with them—they loved it."

The line was still in its embryonic stage, and from there the two companies decided that—unlike their previous co-ventures—the IP would be wholly developed as a joint-enterprise encompassing short-form animation, collectible building sets and a rich gaming experience. As a global franchise, Mixels will focus on Cartoon Network's core six to 12 boy demo. But owing to the universality of the initial character design and Lego's wide appeal, Stuart Snyder, president and COO of Turner's Animation, Young Adults and Kids division, expects that girls will also be interested in the Mixels universe. "It's a natural extension and evolution of content," he says, describing why Cartoon Network decided to invest in the new IP. "Our audience is really focused on digital platforms, and this is something new and fresh."

Sorcher says that the new concept was borne from an understanding of how new content is being consumed in today's market. "This is really about storytelling in a different way," he says. "We are letting go of the traditional views and processes. It's not a top-down kind of approach; we are trying something new here."

The concept itself has been the subject of intense speculation from both industry insiders and Lego's passionate online fan community. In an effort to keep an air of mystery around the franchise, CN and Lego are playing it close to the vest. However, Wilfert confirms that on the product side, the idea for Mixels emerged from a new mini ball-joint that Lego had in development last summer. Reportedly, the ball-joint will allow for smaller-scale articulation that gives the user additional angles to connect different Lego pieces. "It's a new connection within our building system itself," confirms Wilfert. "The whole idea is to allow kids to unlock their creativity and create a buildable collectible, which is new for our company."

## A cast of new characters

The tactile new connection will also be the basis for the conceptual framework of Mixels content, says Sorcher. "It's a world of unlimited combinations," he says. "There is a giant set of characters that can combine with each other, and the content will proceed with that underlying principle in mind."

The look and feel of Mixels also represents a change from the standard Lego brick. While a scant few images have thus far been released, the IP's cross-pollination with Cartoon Network is evident in those that have been made public. "It's a bit of a different expression for us," says Wilfert. "People are used to seeing the Lego MiniFigure as an icon, but these characters express themselves in a different way."

Cartoon Network and Cartoonnetwork.com are set to debut the first wave of content next March. Expect short-form 2D-animated eps to introduce the concept to the world, along with an immersive app-powered gaming experience and low-priced mini-building



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sets. While the number of SKUs is still under wraps, global mass-market retailers are expected to pick up the entire line of products when they launch next March, owing to Lego's track record and legacy.

"There will be different formats for different platforms," says Sorcher. "The online game will look different than the TV, and that will look a bit different from the building sets. But it will all be connected—it's all in the same family."

Lego, for its part, is handling toy design, manufacturing and distribution, as well as licensed publishing. Cartoon Network Enterprises, meanwhile, is looking after licensing for all other non-toy Mixels merch. However, the launch of a full-scale licensing program into secondary categories like apparel, accessories and publishing won't be pursued until next year.

Of course, the coordination of a global product launch of this scale is formidable. "Our timeline was really tight. Creating the content, and then making the product, it really couldn't have been done any faster," Sorcher says. He adds the corporate cultures melded seamlessly, which made for a smooth process.

"When you think about the Lego design team in Denmark and our animators in L.A., they really aren't that different. This is a group of people, from executives to game designers and artists, that all have a fundamental feel for the product. The content matters to everyone."

Snyder admits that there are inherent risks in introducing a wholly new IP into a stubbornly risk-averse retail environment. "This is a new direction in many ways," he says, citing Cartoon Network's partnering with a toyco from the outset and using short-form animation as Mixels' primary content driver. "Any time you do something brand-new, there are risks involved, but these are good, calculated risks."

## From content strength to strength

One factor that makes the partnership a good bet is Lego's stellar track record with content based on its toys so far. With the runaway DVD and viral video success of Lego's movie parodies, and *Legends of Chima* and *Ninjago* providing ratings wins for CN, the glow around the toyco's content is substantial. Accordingly, next year Lego will make its theatrical debut with *The Lego Movie*, which has attracted a good chunk of Hollywood's A-List to voice its big-budget mix of CGI and stop motion.

Not surprisingly, Lego's content successes weren't accidental. Wilfert says they're the result of the toyco's careful approach and all-in philosophy. "We are focused on quality,"

she says. "We start with storyline and great characters—we don't start with a product as our anchor point." Additionally, she says the affinity for the Lego brand is so high and universal that audiences are excited to engage with it in a different way.

Sorcher agrees that audiences' adoration of Lego is a great starting point for understanding why its content has been so successful. However, he adds that the creatives' relationships with the brand also play a pivotal role. "Animators, in general, have a very unique and special connection with Lego," he says. "To a lot of them, Lego was their first creative outlet when they were kids. So, it follows that there is a lot of passion and creativity that stems from that. It's that magic that you see on the screen." **K**



Lego says Mixels will express their characters in a distinct way from iconic Lego MiniFigures





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Elias has had success  
in its native Norway,  
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take it to the rest  
of the world

## Norwegian tugboat Elias docks at Henson

Sometimes you have to cast a wide net to discover a fresh new idea. That is just what The Jim Henson Company's EVP of global distribution, Richard Goldsmith, did when he decided to meet with Sigurd Slåttembrekk at Kidscreen Summit a couple of years ago. The former concert pianist from Norway had developed a locally successful preschool property centered around a rescue boat named Elias that intrigued Goldsmith. "I pride myself on being an expert on kids TV, so I was pretty disappointed with myself that I had never heard of Elias," he says. "When I actually saw the content, I was just blown away."

In short order, Henson began working with the property owner, Norway-based Animando, to acquire both the media distribution rights for a proposed new Elias series and related global consumer products rights.

Seemingly unbeknownst to anyone outside Norway, Elias the Little Rescue Boat, which is based on a children's picture book published in 1999, spawned a 39-episode TV series that aired on the country's largest commercial broadcaster (TV2) in 2005, and two full-length movies.

Goldsmith says that he was struck by series' aspirational main character and his relationship with other vehicles, including a helicopter and a submarine. "They are really great little adventure stories that impart the values of cooperation and friendship," he says. "Like many of the most popular preschool heroes, Elias is a young person learning about the world around him."

Equally intriguing for Goldsmith was the localized, but successful, licensing program that Animando had built around the property. "Their toy and DVD numbers were astronomical for a country that size," says Goldsmith. "With a population around five million in Norway, they sold one million bags of Elias-branded chips!" In fact, since its introduction in 1999, the little tugboat has had Norwegian cash registers humming to the tune of roughly US\$70 million spent on licensed grocery, toys and publishing products.

When presented with the IP, Henson EVP of global consumer products Melissa Segal immediately saw the potential for a substantial and sustainable licensing program, owing to a gap in the marketplace. "Water vehicle play is a pattern that has been under-served," she says. "Elias has a combination of aspiration and adventure that is very attractive."

Segal says toys will drive the program, with a special emphasis placed on bath and water toys. Apparel and accessories are also being considered. And if all goes according to plan, Elias merchandise will hit mass US retail in 2015.

With the assistance of Henson, new series *Elias: Rescue Team Adventures* is currently being produced by Animando, with production underway in Iceland. The new 52 x 11-minute series will have a global aim and tap into formidable children's TV talent including UK-based consultant Theresa Plummer Andrews, who's serving as an executive producer. The series makes its debut at MIP Junior, and the IP will also be introduced to potential licensees at Brand Licensing Europe next month. —Gary Rusak





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# KINKY & COSY

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## DOUBLE TROUBLE!



MEDIA TOON

Booth 10.09

## Licensee Lowdown

# If the shoe fits—Heyday innovates licensed footwear

**Who:** Former toy designer Darin Hager founded Heyday Footwear in 2006 after years spent cutting his teeth in the shoe world, designing for brands such as DKNY and Puma. Since then, based just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, Hager has built a direct-to-consumer business through HeyDayFootwear.com and is increasingly focusing on licenses and innovative brand partnerships to grow it.

**What:** Melding his distinct fashion-and-toy-influenced style, Hager's unique shoes incorporate modular and removable components to create a fresh look in a category dominated by a handful of major brands.

"I've been heavy into footwear design for 16 years," he says. "I design shoes for technical performance, comfort and, of course, style."

The snappy trends seem particularly well-suited to being incorporated with licenses and non-traditional partnerships. His first foray into the licensing world was with THQ, the now-defunct publisher of video game franchise Saint's Row, for *Saint's Row: The Third*. "I thought it would be great to just license the name, but since I was working with THQ at an early stage, we developed a way to incorporate my shoes into the game itself."

In the game, the Planet Saints clothing store contains a glass display case filled with special versions of Heyday shoes. The twist is that real-life versions of the virtual limited-edition kicks could be purchased through Heyday's website and the Saint's Row online store. "It really drove a lot of traffic to our website," he says. "It was a great partnership."

On a more traditional front, Heyday has also just picked up a license for Jim Henson's *Fraggle Rock* 30th Anniversary and has created a shoe that features main character Gobo adorned with a splash of hot pink fur affixed to the shoe's tongue.

**Latest innovation:** Hager's latest move involved leveraging his personal relationship with tween pop group sensation Hot Chelle Rae's guitarist Nash Overstreet. "He wanted a custom-made shoe for the 27 dates that the band opened for Justin Bieber's Believe Tour this summer," explains Hager. "I designed a mint-green-and-purple-metallic shoe, and Nash wore them on stage every date of the tour."

The shoes were a hit with the predominately tween girl audience, and this month Heyday is launching the unique creations on its website for the tween-friendly price of US\$75 a pair. As well, Overstreet has agreed to promote the products to his legion of Twitter followers and on YouTube.

**What's Next:** Expect Hager to delve deeper into both the pop music and gamer world with a number of deals on the table that include well-known personalities and one iconic game franchise. "The kind of deal we did with Nash, we see that working with other people in the pop music world," he says.

**Contact:** Darin Hager, founder (darin@HeydayFootwear.com, 347-443-9329)

—Gary Rusak





# Beatrix Girls to rock out at retail



Original pop music crafted specifically for the all-doll band should set Beatrix Girls apart at retail

**A** new entrant in the doll aisle this fall is looking to capitalize on the blurred lines between entertainment and play. “We like to look at it as a pop band that just happens to be 12-inch dolls,” says Sherry Gunther, creator and CEO of The Beatrix Girls. “It’s not just a doll line, it’s an entertainment brand that will have life in every medium.”

The Beatrix Girls made its debut at Licensing Show in June, and its licensor has since announced a slew of deals in advance of the dolls’ US retail launch next month. The IP features four teenage rock stars—Brayden, Ainsely, Lark and Chantal—and the brand’s original music is written and produced by an unnamed artist who, Gunther says, is responsible for some of radio’s top hits. They are also uniquely packaged with their very own, customized pint-sized Peavey-branded instruments, made possible by a strategic partnership with Peavey Electronics, a leading manufacturer of musical instruments and professional sound equipment.

Another mark of differentiation for the line is the dimension and style of the dolls. “We didn’t follow the conventional thinking in terms of design,” says Gunther. “We stayed away from the rounded faces and the traditional proportions and went for a more angular look.”

The concept was strong enough to attract the attention of Toys ‘R’ Us, which has agreed to carry the dolls in the US. Additionally, US girls specialty/accessories store

Justice will stock Beatrix Girl dolls, licensed instruments and stands.

A number of licensees have lined up to be a part of the program before the dolls take their first curtain call, including Children’s Apparel Network (master apparel), Berkshire Fashions (baseball caps, headwear), Jay Franco & Sons (bedding, bath) and AME (girls sleepwear).

Gunther sees the property as an overall lifestyle brand for girls six to 12, driven by the original music and doll line. “Right now there are eight original songs, and we are working on more,” she says. “We have lots of people on the team who are music industry veterans, and we are focused on getting the music out there.”

As for content, there are live-action webisodes that serve to introduce the four stars and their music. Currently, five short features can be found on the brand website ([www.thebeatrixgirls.com](http://www.thebeatrixgirls.com)).

“Because we consider this a real band, we felt that it would belittle the characters if the webisodes were animated,” says Gunther.

After the dolls hit shelves in the fall, expect them to do what any young band must — hit the road. “They will be heading to London in the spring,” says Gunther, hinting that holographic technology might be employed to make a Beatrix Girls live concert a reality. “Having live events is definitely part of our product evolution strategy.” —Gary Rusak

## eOne is So So Happy about recent acquisition

**I**n an effort to expand its reach in the licensing world, Entertainment One has made two complementary acquisitions that hint at where the company is looking for future growth.

First, the Canada/UK-based company has acquired lifestyle design brand Art Impressions. Chiefly known for its Skelanimals and So So Happy brands, the company was founded by Cindy Bailey and enjoys relationships with more than 500 licensees worldwide in 42 different countries.

“We’ve wanted to be involved in lifestyle brands for awhile,” says Olivier Dumont, MD of eOne Family. “Art Impressions was exactly what I was looking for—their look is very appealing, and there is a lot of depth to their brands.”

The acquisition bolsters eOne’s licensing profile in an area Dumont believes is ripe for growth.

“The strategy is to expand into teenage-skewing merchandise and lifestyle,” he says, adding that eOne is also looking to fortify its licensing arm in order to serve the needs of the burgeoning entertainment side of the company.

“We want to make sure our licensing division can handle the next *Twilight* or *Hunger Games* [which eOne distributed theatrically in the UK and Canada],” he says. As well, Dumont says Bailey’s expertise in design-led properties will also be utilized to help develop programs around eOne’s music division.

eOne also recently scooped up YouTube’s cartoon hit *Simon’s Cat*. The animated series of shorts

created by British animator Simon Tofield features a hungry house cat who uses comedic tactics to get his owner to feed him. The shorts found online success in 2009, and last year Walt Disney Animation Studios began releasing more eps of the series.

“We have wanted to grow in the digital area,” says Dumont. “We will be developing a large licensing and merchandising program including gifts, apparel, publishing and, of course, pet products.”

Accordingly, Cindy Bailey and the Art Impressions team will take the lead in designing new style guides for the program. “Art Impressions’ design team is good at understanding that demo,” says Dumont. “They know that market very well, and they know how to position these brands so that they appeal to teenagers and young adults.” —Gary Rusak



DESPERATELY  
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MEDIATOON

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Reggie the Veggie Crocodile is one of the more unusual characters featured in Stan Lee's Kids Universe



## Another world

A comic book legend takes on children's publishing with Stan Lee's Kids Universe

**T**he iconic creator of some of the world's best-known comic book characters has recently turned his attention towards children's literature. "We are looking for exceptional children's stories that kids will love and that their parents will love to have them read," says Stan Lee, in that oh-so-familiar timbre.

The man behind Spider-Man and X-Men, and former president and chairman of Marvel Comics, now helms Stan Lee's Kids Universe, a children's book imprint and joint-venture between Lee's POW! Entertainment and 1821 Comics.

The imprint's initial roster of quirky kid-friendly titles such as *Monsters Vs Kittens* from writer and artist Dani Jones, *Once Upon a Time* and *Reggie the Veggie Crocodile* hit retail last year. Not surprisingly, given Lee's notoriety, the boutique label has since received a flood of pitches and ideas from eager authors.

"We have to be very selective," says 1821 Comics and Stan Lee's Kids Universe co-founder and CEO Terry Douglas. "We turn down probably 97% of what we see. But we all owe it to Stan to select the best—we want to stay true to the world that Stan really created."

With that in mind, the imprint recently inked a three-book deal with bestselling eBook author Julie Dweck to create titles focusing on sports and getting children more active. The first character is Caddypillar, a lepidoptera who shares his love of sports with his friends. The book will be illustrated by Chris Kennett, an Australian author and illustrator.

"Julia's writing is intelligent and entertaining and doesn't talk down to children," says Lee. "Chris does a beautiful job, too. When you get the right artists together, it's a very good thing."

Lee says since children are spending more and more of their time looking at screens, it's important to tell a story about the benefits of physical activity and sport. "Give a kid a ball, and he's a happy kid," he says. "Anything that can make it seem like fun for young kids to get off their butts and move around is exactly what is needed today."

The first of the three books will find its way into mass retail later this year. While Douglas is working towards complementing the imprint with a number of digital extensions, including mobile apps, Stan Lee's Kids Universe will remain chiefly a traditional publishing proposition. It plans a relatively modest output of five to seven books a year, with quality and a positive message being the overriding concerns.

"If you have a children's story without a message," says Lee, "you have only done half your job." —Gary Rusak



# Building momentum

**Spin Master sets course for growth with construction toyco buy**

**T**oronto, Canada-based toyco Spin Master has purchased iconic French construction toy company Meccano to further its strategy of growth through acquisition. “We are transforming from a toy company to a toy and entertainment and gaming company,” says Ben Gadbois, Spin Master global president and COO. “We saw a huge opportunity here.”

Of course, the US\$1.8-billion construction category is particularly attractive right now. As toy sales in general have been mired in a decade-long decline, sales of construction toys grew by 20% in the US in 2012.

Gadbois says there were many factors that made Meccano an appropriate acquisition target. It’s estimated that the brand generated between US\$40 and US\$50 million in sales last year, and that Spin Master spent an estimated US\$15 million to buy the company.

“We did some digging and realized that there really had not been much innovation in Meccano for decades,” he says. “That is our core strength, so we can bring that to brand.”

The metal building set company has been in business since 1901 and currently has a larger customer base in Europe. Known as Erector Sets in the US, the brand has fallen from public consciousness since its peak in the 1960s, and currently inhabits a niche in the specialty toy market. Gadbois says Spin Master is planning on leveraging its marketing and retail relationships for a fall 2014 relaunch of Erector Set in the US. Possible licensing tie-ins with other Spin Master brands in the future are also on the table.

“Outside of France, there has just been very little marketing at all,” he says. “We are going to look at the brand from a global standpoint and re-position and re-link kids to it. Frankly,



today’s kids in North America just don’t know it that well.”

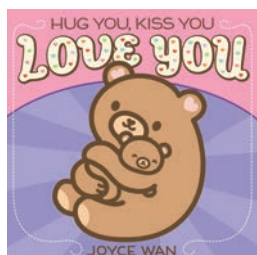
Of course, there’s the 800-pound gorilla in the room—Lego. The Denmark-based company currently has a 75% market share of construction toy sales and is the primary driver of the category’s seeming resistance to recession.

Gadbois says Meccano, with its more complex sets and metal materials, is a different proposition for the consumer. “Meccano is never going to be Lego,” he says. “The play pattern is much more involved, and it skews a little older. While we will work to bring the demographic down a little, we are not positioning this against Lego.”

As part of the sale, Spin Master has committed to keeping Meccano’s primary manufacturing base in Calais, France. “There is a strong heritage there,” says Gadbois. “It’s actually very competitive in terms of cost because of levels of automation, and we were quite impressed when we first went there.”

Gadbois adds that Spin Master is still on the “acquisition path” and is looking to grow its market share through purchasing companies in a number of sectors. “We are very aggressively looking to add neighboring categories, and also add to categories that we are already in,” he says, noting that Spin Master’s revenues are up 20% over last year’s right now. “We like that kind of growth,” he admits.

—Gary Rusak



## BookBet Hug You, Kiss You, Love You

Coming in late November for the preschool set is the latest from *You Are My Cupcake* creator Joyce Wan—*Hug You, Kiss You, Love You*. From Scholastic imprint Cartwheel Books, the 14-page board book with a full-foil cover will hit retail at the end of November. The book looks to celebrate the small, everyday joys of parental love with a cast of endearing mommy and baby animals; sweet is the name of the game here. Retailing for US\$6.99, the title will have distribution at retailers worldwide. —Gary Rusak





# Back to basics

Nick's newest research examines mom and kid behaviors around traditional toys

BY ERIN MILLER

Play holds a fundamental place in kids' lives. It's essential to a child's development, and it's one of the most essential things we do in the first decade of our life. In our efforts to continually understand the role of play, we went back to basics, exploring the types of traditional toys kids frequently play with. In the first of a two-part Kaleidoscope piece on toys, we'll get both a mom and a kid perspective on toys in the home.

Toys are ever-present in the homes of today's families. Understanding that increased digital presence is also occupying kids' playtime, we took tech out of the picture (for the moment), and looked at current attitudes and behaviors around traditional toys (traditional toys defined as any type of toy that isn't a device or video game). A full 55% of moms with kids ages two to 12 reported that their children play with traditional toys "everyday." Naturally, kids in their preschool years are much more likely to play with toys more

frequently, with 85% of two- to five-year-olds playing with toys "everyday."

Dolls, construction toys and outdoor sports toys were the top-three toy categories moms said are their kids' favorites. In slight contrast, kids ages seven to 12 reported that outdoor sports toys, construction toys and dolls were their top-three favorite categories. While dolls have a dominant girl skew, and construction appeals mainly to boys, outdoor sports toys appear to appeal to both boys and girls evenly.

Moms and kids were extremely vocal that toys help flex creative and imaginative muscles. Moms are full believers that a "good toy" fosters creativity and allows kids to use their imagination freely. Additionally, any toy that helps build social skills is a winner in moms' eyes. For example, moms champion doll play as they feel this helps young girls develop the social skills they need as they get older. A construction toy, meanwhile, allows kids to use their creativity to build freely for hours on end. Paired with the fact that kids genuinely find building fun makes these types of toys win-wins for moms.

When it comes to receiving toys, kids said they're most likely to get a new toy "about once a month." Moms were quick to say that while they aren't purchasing that frequently, kids seem to be constantly receiving new toys from various sources, whether it's from a relative (most likely a grandparent), or a birthday celebration (as favors and gifts) or even a hand-me-down from older siblings or cousins. In looking at shopping behaviors, 74% of moms said they shop more in-store for toys, rather than online. In speaking with moms, there's a strong reliance on online reviews and research before deciding to make a toy purchase. But when it comes to making the actual purchase, moms would much rather do this in person so they can not only see/feel the product, but also deliver the toy to their child almost immediately. When kids were asked if they ever browse or shop online for toys, almost 50% said they do "sometimes." Given kids' constant access to the internet, it's no surprise that kids turn online to get ideas for new toys they want. **K**

**This concludes part one of our study on kids and toys. Next month's Kaleidoscope will continue to explore this topic, taking a look at how, and if, digital has had an effect on playing with toys.**

**For more information, contact [Kaleidoscope@nick.com](mailto:Kaleidoscope@nick.com)**

(Source: Nickelodeon Group Consumer Insights Research, Touchstone Research. Quantitative sample size: N = 1,100 moms with kids ages two to 12, N = 600 kids ages seven to 12)

A major focus of the Brand and Consumer Insights Department at Nickelodeon Kids & Family is to live and breathe kid culture. We continually track and identify trends, and explore what it means to be a kid and teen today. In an effort to keep you in touch with our audience and give a voice to our consumer, we've created the Nickelodeon Kaleidoscope. Every month, Kaleidoscope will capture key areas of interest across the kid and family cultural landscape, provide an understanding of attitudes and behaviors, and report on trends and buzz.



## Muse of the Month

# Leveling-up his family bonding time

Seven-year-old Jeremiah from Chicago values real and virtual play patterns



Jeremiah is a typical seven-year-old in that he has an emerging need for control over his play choices, but still craves play time with his family. On any given day, you can find him playing baseball in the yard with his dad, then bringing the game indoors to finish it virtually. Mom cheers on the winner (usually Jeremiah).

The flow of family game play between real and virtual is natural for Jeremiah. It helps his family bond because it takes access out of the equation. Rain doesn't impede a sports outing. An uncharged battery doesn't foil a bowling match. Jeremiah and his family sometimes play board games like *Monopoly* and *Life*. Other times they bond over digital games like *Pac-Man* or *Mario Kart* on the Wii, tablet, DS, or cell phone. "My dad, sister and mom play with me. We play teams together, and we also play against each other."

The advantage of digital games is that they can be leveled to allow even tiny kids to play "grown-up" games like golf or basketball, and even win sometimes. But they have disadvantages, too. As Jeremiah puts it, "We can only play two at a time. The loser passes the Wii-mote and becomes the cheerleader."

So what does this mean for game creators? Consider the family bonding needs of young kids, add options for more players, and add levels for different developmental stages to ensure when it comes to family bonding time for kids like Jeremiah, it's game on! —Amanda Rosenberg



InsightKids is a research and strategic consulting company dedicated to catalyzing our clients to build innovative, impactful and inspiring experiences for kids and families. To be further inspired by Jeremiah and Insight Kids, visit [www.insightstrategygroup.com/insightkids/](http://www.insightstrategygroup.com/insightkids/).

## Cool or Not? The chosen digital device edition

	Boys 8 to 11 (268)	Girls 8 to 11 (277)	Boys 12 to 15 (275)	Girls 12 to 15 (288)		Boys 8 to 11 (277)	Girls 8 to 11 (268)	Boys 12 to 15 (279)	Girls 12 to 15 (277)
	62.3%	65.7%	52.4%	58.7%	<b>Totally way cool *</b>	71.5%	39.6%	68.1%	32.9%
	20.9%	17.3%	24.7%	20.8%	<b>Very cool *</b>	17.0%	20.5%	15.1%	21.7%
	10.8%	11.2%	17.8%	15.6%	<b>Kinda cool *</b>	9.0%	22.8%	12.5%	26.0%
	3.4%	3.2%	3.3%	3.5%	<b>Not cool *</b>	0.7%	10.1%	2.5%	11.9%
	2.6%	2.5%	1.8%	1.4%	<b>Totally un-cool *</b>	1.8%	7.1%	1.8%	7.6%
	1.8%	1.4%	1.8%	1%	<b>Don't know what it is</b>	1.1%	5.3%	1.8%	2.8%



Tablet



Video game consoles

\* Excludes "Don't know what it is" responses



Cool or Not? is part of KidSay's April/May 2013 Trend Tracker. These one-of-a-kind research reports are published 10 times a year and provide a quantitative and qualitative picture of kids' likes, dislikes and trends gathered through in-school surveys with US kids ages five to 15. Contact Bob Reynolds (913-390-8110 or [bob@kidsay.com](mailto:bob@kidsay.com)).





# The hundred-dollar question

Can a US\$99 microconsole like Ouya save a gaming industry that doesn't necessarily need rescuing?

BY WENDY GOLDMAN GETZLER

**W**ith a staggering 126 million Americans playing a game on their mobile phones at least monthly, it's only fitting that a console operating completely on Android, priced under US\$100, would be welcomed with open arms—to the tune of US\$8.5 million in Kickstarter funding, to be exact. Three-month-old HD microconsole Ouya, with the skin of a console and the heart of an Android, is carving out a new open-ended gaming market that's already luring competitors like Amazon. So far, 22,000 developers have committed themselves to the product and the casual gaming market, upon first glance, is primed to do the same.

"We wanted to bring back innovative console gaming to the TV at a price-point that lets families demo games and not shell out US\$50 before even trying them," says Julie Uhrman, founder and CEO of Ouya and the L.A.-based studio of the same name. Ouya operates like a smartphone in that it doesn't use physical media formats and offers games

ranging between US\$0.99 and US\$19.99, all of which are free to try before purchasing. The console also supports apps, meaning streaming media services like Netflix on the device will be a possibility in the near future, making it as much an entertainment center as a gaming console.

For now, though, the focus is on games, which currently number 360 from major developers like Sega to small indie outlets. Roughly 40 to 50 new games, which must have a free-to-play component, are being added per week, all of which offer the developer a 70% revenue share.

"The casual gamer doesn't want to pay for anything—they want free stuff. And if you don't have compelling content, it's not going to sell hardware, even if that hardware is selling for a dollar," says David Riley, an analyst at New York-based market research firm The NPD Group. (It is currently tracking sales of microconsoles across all channels, with the exception of Ouya's own website.) "You have to focus on content, and it's hard to separate the wheat from the chaff on an open system. Developers





At just US\$99, Ouya is positioning itself to be a console game-changer

in the space need to start coding and making titles that are ported well to TV.”

Encouraging development on the open gaming platform is what Uhrman refers to as a very simple creation process that entails downloading Ouya’s software development kit, making a game and then submitting it for content review. It’s so simple, she contends, that an eight-year-old and his father recently created *Astronaut Rescue* for the console in a matter of days.

“We’re making sure games are great experiences and that they’re optimized for TV and for the controller. They have to look good and play well,” Uhrman says. “There’s nothing new in the traditional console space. We’re seeing inventive creative games moving more to mobile and the web because they’re easier to develop for,” she says.

However, Riley—and current NPD stats—beg to differ. “This is a new frontier for the industry—an industry that is doing well,” he says. “It’s just suffering a hangover from when the Wii first launched; it hasn’t crashed but is rather correcting itself. It’s not imploding, it’s expanding.”

Among July 2013 hardware sales in the US, for instance, Nintendo’s portable 3DS system led the way for the third consecutive month with a 14% sales increase (140,000 units) over July 2012. Admittedly, overall sales of video game hardware, software and accessories in the US declined 19% to US\$443 million in July, but this figure now only represents half of the total cash

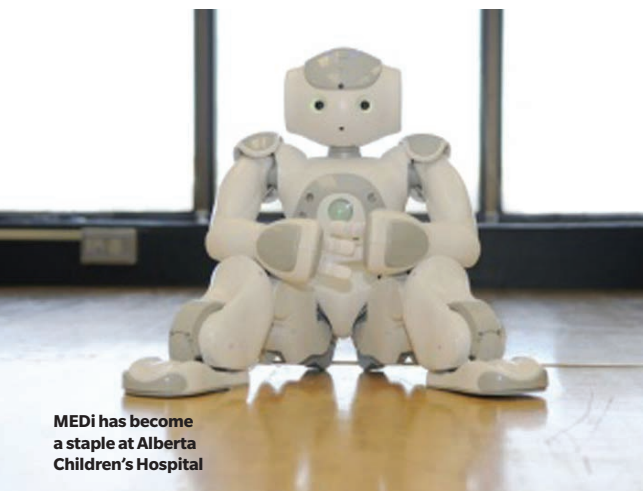
consumers spend on games. When factoring in used and rental games and digital sales—including apps, content downloads, micro-transactions, subscriptions and social games—the total spend comes in at just under US\$1.2 billion for the month.

“Look at *Skylanders* raking in big bucks because Activision was willing to take risks,” notes Riley. “Ouya has opened the gates and there’s a lot to be said for being first to market. Up-and-coming competitors are vying for mindshare, and Ouya already has it.” (He’s referring to newcomers GameStick from PlayJam, Mad Catz’s Project M.O.J.O., and unofficially, a Kindle-based Amazon product that is expected to launch later this fall.)

Being first to market also means it’s too soon for research firms like NPD to measure Ouya’s impact. Plus, the company has spent the past three months fulfilling product commitments from its Kickstarter campaign, so sales figures are not yet accurate. Even considering these factors, Riley says there’s room for Ouya in this ever-changing market because it’s not squarely competing with Nintendo, Microsoft or Sony—two of which have major console releases planned this fall with the Xbox One and PlayStation 4. Also, Ouya should be attractive for families, as it’s more convenient for parents to browse through an app store and download demos rather than walk into a retailer like GameStop. With holidays shopping approaching, fuelled by bargain-hunting parents, Ouya—and the industry—may get some market answers. **3**

## TechWatch Keeping an eye on the gadget scene

# The future of helpful humanoids



MEDi has become a staple at Alberta Children’s Hospital

### What it is

Of all places, children’s hospitals should be rife with entertainment value. That’s why Alberta Children’s Hospital in Canada has introduced a child-like talking robot—aptly named MEDi—to interact with and entertain children during unpleasant visits. MEDi’s debut was timed with a study conducted by Alberta Health Services and the University of Calgary that found the robot had the potential to comfort young patients receiving flu shots and, in some cases, make the pain more tolerable.

### How it works

MEDi, which is short for Medicine and Engineering Designing Intelligence, was created by Paris-based startup Aldebaran Robotics, the company behind the US\$15,000 NAO educational robot. MEDi can mimic a child’s movements and be programmed to walk, dance, converse, play games, make contact and offer high-fives. MEDi is also capable of delivering health-related information to kids in laymen’s terms.

### What it means

With the robotics industry picking up significant steam, a humanoid such as MEDi certainly has the potential to make children’s interactions with robots a more common occurrence. Of course, a natural fear that comes with today’s kids’ over-exposure to technology is that they will lose sight of human interaction, so it will be interesting to see new lines being drawn when it comes to robots that are designed to act like kids themselves. —Wendy Goldman Getzler





**New Kid** in Town

# Growth spurt

**Virtual world WoozWorld is staying relevant for its 28 million tween members with mobile and toy-integrated ventures**

Montreal, Canada-based social network WoozWorld, and in the past four months Ripley has welcomed more than 4.5 million virtual patrons. She's the poster child for WoozWorld, a three-year-old COPPA-compliant MMOG and 45-person company of the same name that's now poised to offer its community of 28 million tween users new mobile ventures, branded play experiences and toy-integrated gaming opportunities. The online world, which has grown largely via word-of-mouth marketing, is a user-generated play environment and social network that lets tweens build customized environments and enhance these spaces using virtual goods. And unlike gender-skewed competitors such as Stardoll, it's designed for both boys and girls.

**Think like a tween** "We haven't really been ready to blow up until now," says founder and CEO Eric Brassard of WoozWorld, which drew one million users in its first year, five million in its second and a whopping 20 million this year. The numbers speak to a big stickiness factor, contends Brassard, as WoozWorld engagement levels clock in at an average of 80 minutes per user per day during the summer months. "Kids are building their own experiences and are more inclined to then stay, play and hang out," says company advisor Mark Rosenberg, whose background is steeped in the toy industry having, launched Furby for Tiger Electronics in the 1990s. "What's neat for toy people as potential advertisers and sponsors is that we can work with brands in different ways—for instance, they can rent a room in WoozWorld and let kids then play in a branded environment." The site did something along these lines recently with HarperCollins, which ran a year-long promotion featuring two to four selected virtual book samples every month. In total, WoozWorld users took more than 30 million sample books. "Yes this is advertising, but we don't do traditional banners," says Brassard. "It's about creating play space." WoozWorld also monetizes through the sale of virtual goods, which bring in roughly US\$300,000/month for the company.

**Next moves** "The tween demo is one that's in complete flux, and tastes change so quickly," Brassard says. To keep up, WoozWorld is putting a larger emphasis on its mobile plans, having created a platform-agnostic mobile game that allows kids to play on a PC or their iOS and Android smartphones. (Not unlike Disney Infinity's new console-agnostic, user-generated content feature.) Also speaking to today's toy/integrated gaming trend—and Rosenberg's toy experience—is a property launching later this year called Intergalactic Wrestling Association. "We've already built a tool box where kids are creators, and so we can watch how they play with something and then track stats and launch something for them," says Rosenberg. "This will translate into the toy world, as we are looking to involve kids to drive storylines, which will then influence toys." With roughly 50% of users hailing from the US and 10% in Canada (the rest are largely from the UK, Australia, France and Brazil, thanks to both French and Portuguese platforms), these larger areas of focus will first be rooted in the US before extending globally. —Wendy Goldman Getzler

**Play group** The answer to how much influence tweens are having on the interactive space may just be found at the hands of a 12-year-old virtual shop owner named Ripley. The Illinois tween created a store—or Unitz—on

## The Digits

Numbers that speak volumes about kids and technology

Visits to video-streaming websites in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden jumped

**190%**

between June 2012 and June 2013  
(comScore Media Metrix)



Young and wired:  
Nearly

**10%**

of UK kids receive their first mobile phone by age five—with 11 being the average age for a first phone  
(uSwitch)

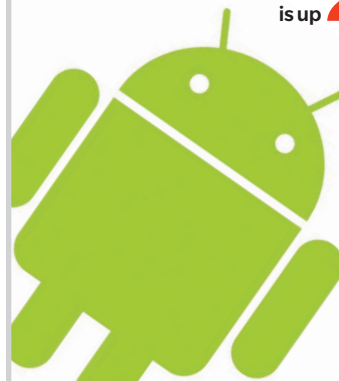
Smartphone sales grew

**46.5%**

in the second quarter of this year, and Android's market share is up

**24%**

in one year  
(Gartner)



Within three years, more than

**80%**

of smartphone users will game on their devices  
(eMarketer)





WILDERNUTS (26 X 7 MINS)



JIGGIJUMP (25 X 5 MINS)



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BY BRENDAN CHRISTIE

**MIP** jr.

# Finding the funnymakers

Good comedy might be all about the timing, but unearthing and keeping the best comedic talents comes down to dedication to development



The one thing hit comedies *Strange Hill High* (bottom), *Sanjay and Craig* (top) and *Regular Show* (opposite) have in common is single-minded creators stuck on pursuing their funny ideas

**T**wo producers walk into a bar... And then they... How does that one go again?

Any kids broadcaster you speak to right now will tell you they're looking for one thing—comedy. While a good comedic concept that piques a commissioner's interest is hard to find, locating the talent who can bring a project to life is arguably even more difficult.

Most experienced development teams know where to find the best writers, showrunners, directors and animators in the world. But when it comes to children's programming, it's still a small industry, and those at the top of the comedy heap can only work on so many shows at once. It's also vital that fresh voices and talents are discovered, especially as new outlets come into play.

Consider initiatives like Amazon Studios, and deals such as the Netflix/DreamWorks partnership for 300 hours of original animation—the pressure is on to find creatives. And some say finding the right staff, especially at a senior level, is already getting harder. In fact, discovering new talent while doing everything in your power to grow the abilities of those you already have, has become the go-to strategy.





**Digital: Boon or Bust?** YouTube and other digital outlets represent an enormous amount of creative churn, but they're a mixed blessing. "Twenty years ago, the only way you were able to break out was after you had moved through the system," observes FremantleMedia Kids & Family Entertainment EVP Bob Higgins. "But quite honestly, by that point sometimes the uniqueness had been smashed out of you, and you fit into the typical mold," he contends. "That being said, the more experimental voices coming online these days often need some refining. They can be very funny and unique for a 15- or 30-second bit, but when you then try to expand that to a half hour of content, they can't always make the transition."

In other words, capturing pratfalls and shenanigans on a phone and uploading them to YouTube is one thing. Sustaining the funny for an entire series is another. And there are other issues, notes Higgins. "Quite often, people online and on YouTube believe their own press," he cautions. "People tell them: 'You're so brilliant.' And they come to think they are. And you're like: 'Uh—to a point.' They don't like to hear that."

Turning online for talent, therefore, can mean girding yourself for extra work. "In the past, we've gone after some performers we found on YouTube we felt we'd love to build something around," says Stephanie Betts, VP of development for Canada's DHX Media. "Sometimes it works out, but it's an uphill battle."

"Getting into that space, we acknowledge that there is going to be major, heavy lifting. And we make sure, whether it's the performer or the brand owner, that they're willing to evolve the project wherever we believe it should go."

If it can go, that is. Even when you're looking at a successful online game or app execution, that success doesn't mean it has the characters to sustain a series. Sometimes, notes Betts, big traffic doesn't indicate TV potential. "I don't care that something has had 700 billion downloads," she



A rare feat—*Horrible Histories* successfully imparts real learning while bringing loads of laughs

## Learn from everything

Creating good comedy is especially hard when you have a strong education remit. CBBC Controller Cheryl Taylor says it's not necessarily always about pure pratfall-driven laughs, but rather infusing humor into every show. She points to Lion Television's *Horrible Histories* as a case in point.

"I think that show, more than anything else, is crammed full of valuable history and facts and figures for kids," she notes. "But it is made, written and performed in such a brilliant way that it is almost like watching an animation." And Taylor says that kids six to 12, who love animation, have picked up on those characteristics.

But she also points to drama series *Wolfblood* as an important learning experience. Although targeted younger, the show has attracted an audience into the low teens through its sometimes satirical style.

"I think we've realized, as a channel trying to serve six to 12s, we have an incredibly difficult job. But we recognized that *Wolfblood*, tonally, was bringing in an audience that had perhaps migrated elsewhere, and this reminded us that in terms of comedy we could afford to possibly be a little more satirical and ambitious." —Brendan Christie

says. "That doesn't necessarily mean it will be a successful series."

But the prospect of finding the next *Annoying Orange* has producers plumbing the deepest depths of the digital space, and it's beginning to show.

"I think, for a transitional time, when there were big hits online and in other spaces, everyone went after those people. But now those areas are being farmed like crazy," observes Curtis Lelash, VP of comedy animation at Cartoon Network, the channel that put *Orange* on air. "There are so many people culling those ranks, and there are so many web channels, that it's dizzying to imagine trying to outpace someone there."

Could it be a problem with its own solution? "They are competing today," contends Mike de Seve, founder of New York/L.A.-based Baboon Animation. "But [the platforms]





Set to debut at MIPCOM, *Dr. Dimensionpants* joins DHX Media's growing roster of animated comedies

are merging. Everyone is learning about each other. Web people, those mavericks, are becoming more professional. So it's cross-pollinating in both directions, and I think that's great."

In the end, it's probably less about where the talent comes from and more about the ideas they bring with them. Every new idea is critical. "My philosophy is that you leave no stone unturned," says Russell Hicks, president of content

development and production at Nickelodeon. "You look at everything. You take every meeting. You talk to everyone. You hear every pitch. Because you never know if someone is going to come in and say, 'I have this crazy idea,' and it's the next big thing. It's a game of numbers—the more you can see, the more chances you have of finding a hit."

**Creating creative creators** Finding creators who might have the next big hit is often only the start. It's what comes next that's often more important. "We live, breathe and die by the talent that comes into our studio," says Hicks. "So our whole philosophy is based on this theory of creator-driven and creator-first content, which basically means you find someone who has a great idea and then you wrap a studio around them for support."

He stresses that his team doesn't come up with ideas. "We don't try to force these people to write what we want them to. We look to their ideas. Because of that, they come to us with a passion that is unmatched, compared to someone who is just doing work for hire."

Given that, Nick puts a huge emphasis on development. From working with college outreach programs that craft curriculum to give students useful studio experience, to writer and artist initiatives that offer talent practical know-how, to mentorship programs that partner up-and-coming stars with industry leaders—Nick does it all.

Hicks says it's almost like a graduated program—show the net you have that spark and it will have you work on an interstitial or channel ID. That might lead to a short, which could lead to a show. But at each step, budding



Cartoon Network's brand-new comedy *Uncle Grandpa* came alive during the storyboarding process

## Get on board

When it comes to animated comedy, it's all about the storyboard.

"If you have that mixture of physical- and dialogue-driven comedy, especially in an animated series, the physical really needs to come to life on the board," says Stephanie Betts, VP of development at DHX Media. "If the board doesn't sing and you are not laughing when you are flipping the pages, looking at the pictures—even if you don't know the story—then there is a problem."

Curtis Lelash, VP of comedy animation at Cartoon Network, meanwhile, says his team creates bibles as a step in the process. "If you think about it, it's like filling out all the Mad Libs blanks about how a show would be—who are the main characters? What kinds of stories do you do? What's the world?"

Inevitably, though, things move pretty quickly to board after the outline gets written. "Because that's really the journey, where so much is discovered," he says. "For us, unless you see that, you have no idea. In advance, a bible is like writing a story about a trip you haven't been on yet—maybe this will happen? But then you do a board... Now I can describe to you what happened." —Brendan Christie



# What's so funny?

Kidscreen asked a panel of industry experts for their take on what kids find funny and how to write comedy for them. Here's what they had to say.



**Mike de Seve**  
Founder  
Baboon Animation

In some ways, nothing has changed, in that the biggest seller is still slightly boy-centric 6 to 11 comedy, with a strong female voice. Yet I think it's getting a little more gross out there, which is always fun. I started on *Beavis and Butthead*, and it's great to see some of that stuff come full circle. It was definitely taboo for awhile, and now it's being actively sought. I feel like the gloves are off on the nose-picking hand.



**Bob Higgins**  
EVP of Kids &  
Family Entertainment  
FremantleMedia

At the end of the day, there are certain truths. Any great TV show—comedy or drama—is built on characters the audience wants to hang out with for 15 minutes or a half hour because they make them laugh. It's just how you get there that is very different each time.



**Russell Hicks**  
President of Content  
Development and Production  
Nickelodeon Group

We can find a lot of writers who want to write great sitcoms and they are very funny. But they forget that in our world the physical comedy is so important. The audience wants unexpected twists and turns and surprising elements. Kids are looking for things they haven't seen before.



**Curtis Lelash**  
VP of Comedy Animation  
Cartoon Network

When you start thinking about what kids find funny or find interesting, you get into a really dangerous place of possibly becoming condescending or talking down to them. The best people we find just naturally have a pretty broad, kid-friendly sense of humor and ideas about what kind of shows they want to do.



**Stephanie Betts**  
VP of Development  
DHX Media

Fart jokes always work. Fart jokes and physical comedy. I think it's true across the board.

young talent is partnered with someone who gets them over the next hurdle, and he/she is offered a chance to learn from peers.

"People don't usually go into school thinking, 'I want to be a children's television writer,'" says Hicks. "They go in thinking they want to do sitcoms, or write for HBO, and then they fall into this business because either they have a passion for kids, or their ideas are kid-friendly. We have to train them to write for kids because our audience is different."

That's certainly the approach FremantleMedia took with *Strange Hill High*, a co-production with UK-based Factory Transmedia for pubcaster CBBC. Creator Kat Von Henderson emerged from the world of advertising, so Fremantle paired her with alpha showrunner Josh Weinstein (*The Simpsons*, *Futurama*) to craft the project it knew she was capable of producing.

"She was just one of these crazy geniuses who have wonderful ideas and a great mental image of what she wanted to do," recalls Fremantle's Higgins. "But what she didn't have was any experience in really creating three-dimensional characters—how they talk, what their hopes and desires are, and what their relationships are to each other. We needed to surround her with people who got the quirkiness."

A great show like a *SpongeBob* or an *Annoying Orange* often exists only in the mind of a single individual or small group, so these visions have to be nurtured. And DHX's

Betts agrees. "No one person is going to know every single thing about the process. And if they say they do, they are totally lying," she jokes.


For Betts, the creator needs to have a voice at the table. "Whether their expertise is in scripts, direction, or design and storyboards, they need to be on-board from start to finish," she contends. "So we look at building a team around them so they can be successful and feel like

**"People don't go into school thinking, 'I want to be a children's TV writer'...they want to write for HBO. We have to train them."**

— Russell Hicks,  
Nickelodeon

they have support. Nobody wants to feel like they are on an island, trying to make something without that knowledge behind them."

Any great sports team gets built from developing draft picks. The same holds true with comedy talent.

"Our biggest pool of performing talent is within our own studio," sums Cartoon's Lelash. "And our highest rate of success comes from developing people within our own shows to make new shows for us." 



I spent an entire morning on **Google Translate** trying to memorize some **Danish phrases**. I love hearing my voice too; I'm my **biggest fan!** There were **dead raccoons** and **trees floating around**, it was pretty intense. From where I sit, **I feel like an air traffic controller.** For young children, **classic toys**, hand-eye coordination, and **imagination** will **always be important.**

- **Rob Sorcher** at Cartoon Network, describes how he prepared for a meeting at Lego's head office in Denmark
- Comic book legend **Stan Lee**, tongue firmly in cheek, responding to a compliment from a slightly star-struck Kidscreen writer
- Sinking Ship's **JJ Johnson** on the aftermath of a severe flood that wreaked havoc on the Toronto set of his new series *Annedroids*
- **Paul DeBenedittis** at Disney Channels Worldwide explains what it's like to manage content across multiplying platforms
- MGA chief **Isaac Larian** on what kids' play patterns will look like in 10 years



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